NUMBER 28, 2022

LILITH

A FEMINIST HISTORY JOURNAL

Australian National University

ANU PRESS

Lilith: A Feminist History Journal is published by ANU Press
The Australian National University
Canberra ACT 2600, Australia
Email: anupress@anu.edu.au

This title is available online at press.anu.edu.au

ISSN 2652-8436 (online)

This title is published under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) licence.

The full licence terms are available at creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode

Cover design and layout by ANU Press

Cover photograph: Studio portrait of a Japanese woman wearing a kimono in Mareeba, Queensland, Australia. Photographed by Harriet Pettifore Brims, date unknown. Image courtesy of the State Library of Queensland.

© 2022 ANU Press

About Lilith

Lilith: A Feminist History Journal is the journal of the Australian Women's History Network (AWHN). First published in Melbourne in 1984, *Lilith* is a peer-reviewed journal that publishes articles in all areas of women's, feminist and gender history. It is a valuable forum for both new and established scholars. The journal is produced by a collective of postgraduates and early career researchers, along with a distinguished Editorial Advisory Board of leading scholars in the field; it is distributed to subscribers via the AWHN. New collective members are always welcome. Please contact *Lilith* if you are interested in being part of the team.

Editorial Collective

Bridget Andresen (University of Queensland)
Rachel Caines (University of Adelaide)
Emma Carson (University of Adelaide
Brydie Kosmina (University of Adelaide)
Saskia Roberts (The Australian National University)
Lauren Samuelsson (University of Wollongong)
Michelle Staff (The Australian National University)

Editorial Advisory Board

Dr Jane Carey (University of Wollongong)
Dr Sharon Crozier-De Rosa (University of Wollongong)
Prof. Ann Curthoys (University of Western Australia)
Prof. Joy Damousi (University of Melbourne)
Assoc. Prof. Lisa Featherstone (University of Queensland)
Prof. Patricia Grimshaw (University of Melbourne)

Prof. Victoria Haskins (University of Newcastle)
Dr Catherine Kevin (Flinders University)
Prof. Marilyn Lake (University of Melbourne)
Prof. Vera Mackie (University of Wollongong)
Prof. Penny Russell (University of Sydney)
Dr Zora Simic (University of New South Wales)
Prof. Christina Twomey (Monash University)
Prof. Angela Woollacott (The Australian National University)

AUSWHN Journal Manager

Dr Alana Piper (University of Technology Sydney)
Alison Downham Moore (Western Sydney University)

Submissions

Submissions are due in November each year. *Lilith* only publishes articles that constitute an original piece of research. Thus it only accepts articles that are not under review by other journals, and that are substantially different from other published work. All articles are peer reviewed, and only articles that pass the review process are published. *Lilith* will also consider publishing short non-refereed book reviews and discussion essays. Submission guidelines are available at the *Lilith* website.

Access

The journal is only available electronically. All back issues are available via the *Lilith* website.

LILITH: A FEMINIST HISTORY JOURNAL

NUMBER 28, 2022

Contents

Editorial

The Problem with 'Post-' 3
Brydie Kosmina, Rachel Caines and Saskia Roberts

Articles

A Soldier and a Woman: (Re)Negotiating Gender in Female Narratives of Civil Conflict in Tigray, Ethiopia 13
Francesca Baldwin

Sex, Soap and Silk: Japanese Businesswomen in North Queensland, 1887–1941 35
Tianna Killoran

Relational Autonomy: Addressing the Vulnerabilities of Women in a Global Pandemic 55
Petra Brown and Tamara Kayali Browne

Vegetarians, Vivisection and Violationism: Gender and the Non-Human Animal in Anna Kingsford's Life and Writing 73
Ruby Ekkel

Essays: What does it mean to do feminism in 2022?

Activism and Erasure, Preservation and Transmission 99
Sharon Crozier-De Rosa

The Work of Feminist History 105
Ann Curthoys

Reproductive Rights Denied and Delayed 109
Catherine Kevin

Pandemic Pandora 113
Ann McGrath

The Power of Memory for Feminism 119
Janet Ramsay

Feminism beyond the Binary 123
Yves Rees

Stitching Feminism..... 129
Madeleine C. Seys

Solidarity and Justice..... 137
Jordana Silverstein

Depp v. Heard: A Feminist *Mea Culpa*..... 141
Zora Simic

Reviews

Australian Historical Association Conference 2022: 'Urgent Histories' ... 147
Bridget Andresen

Save Our Sons: Women, Dissent and Conscription during the Vietnam War 151
Emma Carson

Sound Citizens: Australian Women Broadcasters Claim Their Voice, 1923–1956..... 155
Belinda Eslick

Vera Deakin and the Red Cross..... 159
Nicola Ritchie

My Body Keeps Your Secrets 163
Zoe Smith

Banning the Bomb, Smashing the Patriarchy 167
Jessica Urwin

Notes on Contributors 171

EDITORIAL

The Problem with 'Post-'

Brydie Kosmina, Rachel Caines and Saskia Roberts

What is the 'new normal'? What does it mean to live in the world 'post-Covid'? These are not new questions; they are questions that have been asked—sometimes hopefully, sometimes in mourning—since 11 March 2020 when the World Health Organization (WHO) declared Covid-19 to be a pandemic. In characterising Covid-19 as a global pandemic WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus made the following remarks: 'Pandemic is not a word to use lightly or carelessly. It's a word that, if misused, can cause unreasonable fear, or unjustifiable acceptance that the fight is over, leading to unnecessary suffering and death'.[1] Words, as Ghebreyesus's statement signals, shape our orientation within the historical event. To use 'pandemic' (rather than, say, epidemic or public health emergency) instills particular moods, behaviours, and political, social and cultural responses. Over the past eight months, as this issue has come together, the language around Covid-19 has shifted. We are now ostensibly living in a 'post-Covid' world despite case numbers placing pressure on healthcare systems, numbers of fatalities continuing to climb, the emergence of new variants and the social, economic and political impacts of the pandemic being far from over. Compounding this sense of being 'after' Covid is the political rhetoric around the pandemic: Australia's political leadership in 2022 has presented a narrative of Covid-19 that lives 'in the past tense'.[2] In this context, we highlight Ghebreyesus's words from what seems like a long time ago at the outset of this issue for several reasons. First, because the questions of living in a 'post-Covid' world are ongoing, and will continue for many years to come, and historians—particularly feminist historians—must address these questions. Secondly,

1 Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, 'WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19–11 March 2020', *World Health Organization*, 11 March 2020, who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020.

2 Michael Toole and Brendan Crabb, 'Australia's response to COVID in the first two years was one of the best in the world. Why do we rank so poorly now?' *Conversation*, 28 July 2022, theconversation.com/australias-response-to-covid-in-the-first-2-years-was-one-of-the-best-in-the-world-why-do-we-rank-so-poorly-now-187606.

because the ubiquity of the conversation of what the 'post-Covid' world will look like evokes long discussions from scholars about the prefix 'post-' in political rhetoric.

To describe something as being 'post-' implies that 'we' (a pronoun that brings with it its own questions and uncertainties) have *moved past the originating events*. But, as has been evidenced over and over again, rarely is this the case. Much like Ghebreyesus's caution around the term 'pandemic', the prefix 'post-' is not to be used lightly or carelessly. Decolonial and anti-racist scholars have demonstrated that the application of 'post-' to 'colonialism' has the potential to offer the comfortable lie to the coloniser that colonialism is finished, a product of the past, something that has been moved beyond and nullified (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has even said in interviews, 'I find the word postcolonialism just totally bogus').[3] This is particularly urgent for researchers in so-called Australia, where the academy and the university as institutions are built on unceded Aboriginal land; to claim to be 'post' colonisation implies that these structures of domination and power have ended when that is anything but the case. Feminist researchers in fact need to be more attentive to the 'colonial project of gender', to use Professor Sandy O'Sullivan's phrase, wherein binary gender norms are instituted as an ongoing feature of the colonial project.[4] Postfeminist sensibilities offer a similar avenue through which (some) feminist ideas are imbricated into mainstream culture and simultaneously critiqued, rejected and/or commodified.[5] What the 'post-' signifies is not, as sometimes seems more comfortable to the privileged and powerful, the quiet acceptance of living 'after the problem' but is, in fact, being *in* the problem itself. To live in the 'post-Covid' world is to live in the Covid world. This issue, despite the varied nature of the scholarship and reflections contained within, is a product of the Covid world.

3 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Robert Young, 'Neocolonialism and the secret agent of knowledge', *Oxford Literary Review* 13, no. 1/2 (1991): 224.

4 Sandy O'Sullivan, 'The colonial project of gender (and everything else)', *Genealogy* 5, no. 67 (2021): 1–9. Professor O'Sullivan also spoke on this in their keynote speech, 'No cession: Rendering the colonial project of gender' at the September 2021 *Lilith* symposium, *Gender in Catastrophic Times*.

5 Rosalind Gill, 'Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a sensibility', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (2007): 162–63. This understanding of postfeminism has also been nuanced and given regional, historical and cultural context in Margaret Henderson and Anthea Taylor's recent book *Postfeminism in Context: Women, Australian Popular Culture, and the Unsettling of Postfeminism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).

The articles in this issue respond to the urgent nature of feminist research in the Covid world. Commonalities emerge across all of the articles in their shared emphasis on intersectional feminist historical research that breaks down assumptions about the universality of gendered experiences. The articles cover feminist vegetarian activism in Victorian England; the lives of Japanese businesswomen in northern Queensland before 1941; negotiations of gender among female combatants in Tigray, Ethiopia; and the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on women. Taken together, these articles demonstrate the fallibility of the notion of history being a narrative of linear progress, and urge against political complacency; against, to return to Ghebreyesus's words, the 'unjustifiable acceptance that the fight is over'.[6] Each of the four articles draws upon new sources and interpretations that shed light on the varied experiences of women within and beyond Australia, often challenging established norms or assumptions in the process.

In 'Vegetarians, vivisection and violationism', Ruby Ekkel explores the centrality of vegetarianism to noted Victorian activist Anna Kingsford's activities and lived experience. In this article, Ekkel argues that while Kingsford's vegetarianism has often been dismissed as trivial or 'kooky', Kingsford's vegetarian beliefs were foundational to her ideas about animal protection, to her relationship with the antivivisectionist movement and to her commitment to women's emancipation. Shifting from Victorian England to interwar northern Queensland, Tianna Killoran's article 'Sex, soap and silk' draws on newly accessible sources to move beyond traditional narratives that characterise Japanese women in this region as impoverished sex workers. She instead considers their entrepreneurial activities both within and outside the sex industry, revealing a dynamic landscape of business activity among this community. Both Ekkel and Killoran offer new perspectives on these women, challenging the gendered stereotypes that have pervaded much of the historiography on their lives and work.

The final two articles in this issue are drawn from papers presented at the 2021 *Lilith* Symposium. Organised around the theme 'gender in catastrophic times', the symposium asked speakers to consider the ways gender has historically been (and continues to be) mediated *through* and *by* catastrophe. Participants were encouraged to interpret the theme of

6 Ghebreyesus, 'WHO Director-General's opening remarks'.

catastrophe broadly; papers covered topics from warfare to the climate crisis, from nuclear testing to economic recession, from pandemics to political and social activism. The diverse ways in which speakers responded to the symposium theme are demonstrated in the two articles. In 'A soldier and a woman', Francesca Baldwin examines how female combatants in Tigray, Ethiopia, negotiated the connections and collisions between soldiering and womanhood during and after the 1974–91 civil war. Baldwin argues that women carefully negotiated their gender performances during the conflict and recognises the long-term impact of participation in the war on combatant women's lives and life trajectories. The article also reflects on the experience of undertaking oral histories during dual crises: the Covid-19 pandemic and the ongoing conflict in Tigray. Finally, Petra Brown and Tamara Kayali Browne's article explores how the individualistic/atomistic model of autonomy in responses to Covid-19 disproportionately disadvantages women. Comparing the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic to historical pandemics, they argue that the concept of individualistic autonomy corresponds to an outdated and patriarchal mode of the social contract that emerged in the seventeenth century, and propose an alternative model of 'relational autonomy' for the 'post-Covid' world.

Like many other scholarly journals—particularly those that focus on feminist research and history, publish work primarily from women, transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming scholars, and promote voices from early career researchers and postgraduate candidates—*Lilith* saw a reduction in submissions over 2021–22.[7] As with every other aspect of the pandemic, the effects of Covid-19 have been felt more by already marginalised people and communities.[8] Living in the Covid world has led the Editorial Collective to find new ways to build feminist research communities and to reflect on feminist praxis in catastrophic times. In this issue, consequently, we reached out to feminist researchers across Australia to invite reflective essays on the question 'what does it mean to do feminism in 2022?' The variety of responses speaks to the vibrant feminist research fields across Australia.

7 Flaminio Squazzoni et al., 'Gender gap in journal submissions and peer review during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. A study on 2329 Elsevier journals', *PLOS ONE* 16, no. 10 (2021): 1–2.

8 Neeta Kantamneni, 'The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on marginalized populations in the United States: A research agenda', *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 119 (2020), doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2020.103439.

These essays reveal the political power of feminist historymaking. Indeed, as Ann Curthoys argues in her essay, feminist history is itself a form of activism. Curthoys points to the disturbing similarities between our past and present, as she, Catherine Kevin and Zora Simic research the history of domestic violence in Australia, finding echoes of our current concerns nearly 200 years ago. Ann McGrath also reflects on the project of feminist history, imploring feminist historians to support and sustain one another and to prioritise First Nations women's knowledge, concerns and understandings of deep time. McGrath describes her feminist heroines—some mythological, some current or past colleagues, all inspirational—and ends with a call to consider hope as the driver of feminist history. Both Curthoys and McGrath focus on how we can ensure our work as feminist historians is both insightful and impactful in the present.

Other essayists examine how our documentation of, and interactions with, feminist history can influence current pushes for change. Janet Ramsay (writing on behalf of the Jessie Street National Women's Library) emphasises the integral role of memory to the feminist project, especially when feminism itself is constantly in flux. Noting both recent achievements and setbacks, Ramsay urges us to remember our feminist past, lest we 'go on reinventing wheels or lose it all'.[9] Similarly, Sharon Crozier-De Rosa discusses the challenge of building on earlier feminist activism, especially when historical research into feminism remains underfunded. Crozier-De Rosa encourages readers to take inspiration from the past, yet to do so without sanitising it; in other words, to view the past as—much like the present day—a complicated terrain characterised by both conflict and unity. These authors argue that we can and should preserve feminist history without treating it as a story of linear progress, particularly when the project of feminist activism is so far from over.

Yet the feminist historian's role in this activism is less than straightforward, as essays by Catherine Kevin, Madeleine Seys and Zora Simic suggest. Kevin documents the hard-won gains of the South Australian Abortion Action Coalition during the Covid-19 pandemic. Like Ramsay, she reminds us to not take abortion policy reform for granted, especially in light of the recent overruling of *Roe v. Wade* in the United States. Seys explores the subversive power of needlework and handmaking, activities traditionally associated with women and therefore dismissed as ephemeral

9 Janet Ramsay, 'The power of memory for feminism', *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal*, no. 28 (2022).

and unable to comment on the human condition. Seys calls our attention to the hidden histories of storytelling and activism associated with these practices. She highlights how she and others have turned to needle and thread to create community, live sustainably and enact the feminist project, especially during the pandemic. Zora Simic complicates our understandings of the public duties of feminist historians, recounting her conflicted feelings as the *Depp v. Heard* trial took the media by storm. Her reflections on how future feminists may analyse this trial and its consequences for victims of domestic violence recall Crozier-De Rosa's call to eschew narratives of progress when analysing the past.

Finally, Jordana Silverstein and Yves Rees push the boundaries of what 'doing feminism' entails in 2022. Silverstein considers whether the feminist movement should remain at the centre of our social justice work, especially when it continues to prioritise white subjects to the detriment of First Nations women. Instead, Silverstein encourages us to decolonise our practices. As part of her own anti-colonial thinking, she aims 'to enact a form of Jewishness … that is beautiful and imaginative'.[10] Rees argues that recent debates about the place of trans women in the feminist project are a 'red herring' and that trans inclusion in the movement is both logical and long existent. They redirect our attention to the productive challenge posed by transness to feminism, as it encourages us to dismantle the gender binary. Doing so can weaken patriarchal notions of masculine superiority, aid in decolonial thinking and lead to liberation from restrictive gender roles. Silverstein's and Rees's essays remind feminist historians to look not just to the past but to the future of our movement, and to think about whether and how it can best serve all marginalised peoples.

The vibrancy and urgency of contemporary feminist historical research is also demonstrated in this issue through the range of conference, monograph and book reviews, covering the Australian Historical Association's (AHA) 2022 conference, radio broadcasting, anti-war and anti-nuclear activism and the lasting physical and psychological impacts of sexual assault and bodily trauma. *Lilith* Editorial Collective member Bridget Andresen's review of the AHA's 2022 conference invites consideration of the urgency of feminist historical research in the 'post-Covid' world. Reflecting on the theme of the conference, 'Urgent Histories', Andresen examines the ways that feminist research presented at the conference has clear

10 Jordana Silverstein, 'Solidarity and justice: What does it mean to do feminism in the year 2022?' *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal*, no. 28 (2022).

resonance with contemporary catastrophes, with bodily autonomy and consent at the forefront of everyone's minds in the wake of the repeal of *Roe v. Wade* days beforehand. The social media conversations during and after the conference as more and more people tested positive for Covid-19 reinforced the nature of the 'post-' prefix actually indicating being *in* the problem.

The book reviews in this issue continue the consideration of the contemporary feminist history landscape. Nicola Ritchie reviews Carole Woods's *Vera Deakin and the Red Cross*, shining light on Vera Deakin's life and the issues that come with writing about a female public figure. Belinda Eslick's review of Catherine Fisher's *Sound Citizens* explores how Fisher defends the place of women's voices on Australian radio, examining how female broadcasters used their position to challenge gender norms and agitate for social change. Emma Carson's review of Carolyn Collins's *Save Our Sons* shows how Collins highlights the heterogeneity of the activist groups under the Save Our Sons banner nationally, and sheds light on the often overlooked anti-war activism of Australian mothers throughout the Vietnam War. Jessica Urwin reviews Ray Acheson's *Banning the Bomb, Smashing the Patriarchy*, which examines the role of feminist activism in the international campaign to abolish nuclear weapons. Finally, Zoe Smith's review of Lucia Osborne-Crowley's *My Body Keeps Your Secrets* discusses the impact of oppressive, patriarchal society on female and non-binary bodies, and the ways persistent trauma can manifest as both psychological and physical scars. Each of the books reviewed demonstrate once again the fallibility of linear narratives of progress, and unpack the often unrecognised and gendered work that goes into enacting and maintaining change.

In a recent piece for the *Conversation*, historian Frank Bongiorno asked 'Do we care enough about COVID?'[11] That is another of the urgent questions that historians will be asking for many years. What this issue of *Lilith* demonstrates is that feminist researchers, scholars, historians and activists *do* care and will continue to care about what it means to live through and after catastrophe. To return one final time to Ghebreyesus's words, 'There's been so much attention on one word [pandemic]. Let me give you some other words that matter much more, and that are much more actionable. Prevention. Preparedness. Public health. Political leadership.

11 Frank Bongiorno, 'Do we care enough about COVID?', *Conversation*, 26 July 2022, theconversation.com/do-we-care-enough-about-covid-187356.

And most of all, people. We're in this together, to do the right things with calm and protect the citizens of the world. It's doable'.[12] There has been so much attention on one prefix, 'post-'. Rather than an insistence on living in a post-Covid world, what this issue offers instead are considerations of living *through* the Covid world, and the ways that attentive feminist historians are reacting in the increasingly urgent present.

12 Ghebreyesus, 'WHO Director-General's opening remarks'.

ARTICLES

A Soldier and a Woman: (Re)Negotiating Gender in Female Narratives of Civil Conflict in Tigray, Ethiopia

Francesca Baldwin[1]
University of Reading and University of Exeter

Abstract

This article examines how female combatants in Tigray, Ethiopia, negotiated the connections and collisions between soldiering and womanhood. It uses original oral histories to investigate the self-presentation of fighter women throughout the 1974–91 civil war in Ethiopia, arguing that women carefully negotiated their gender performances during the conflict. Recognising the long-term impact of participation in war on combatant women has wider implications in the historiography beyond the Tigray case to reassess the enduring impact of conflict engagement on women's lives and life trajectories. At its close, this article makes brief observations about the legacies of fighter women in Tigray in light of the ongoing Tigray War (2020–present).

It is summertime in Adwa, northern Tigray. The rain has washed the sediment from the river and the water is clean to swim again. Tirfe is 11 years old and has run down to play and bathe with her friends. When her elder brother catches up, he angrily reprimands her for going off on her own and demands she return with him. A female fighter in the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) is watching from a distance. She comes over to the pair and confronts Tirfe's brother publicly. Tirfe reflects on this moment nearly 40 years on.

1 I would like to thank my supervisors Dr Heike I. Schmidt and Dr Stacey Hynd for their invaluable support and feedback. I would also extend my gratitude to Dr Beth Rebisz for her mentorship and encouragement, and to *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal* for their thoughtful and constructive reviewing. This article is dedicated to its research participants, and to all women affected by the ongoing Tigray War.

> She said to him, 'Why are you yelling at her? Stop yelling. She has the right to do whatever she wants to do.' And I thought, that's something. That's something new. What do you mean I have the right to do whatever I want to do? That built the idea of what a woman can do for me. I am something. I can do something … It was a life-changing moment for me.[2]

In the 17-year-long civil war in Ethiopia between 1974 and 1991, female combatants formed up to one-third of the leading militarised resistance group known as the TPLF. Through their participation, female fighters challenged the boundaries, roles and possibilities of womanhood in the Tigrayan context. Not only did the soldier in Tirfe's memory inspire new understandings of gender, gender roles and potential, but she also disrupted hierarchies of age and authority over girls in the family home. The very existence and the behaviours of female combatants re-designed the cultural category of womanhood, as set out by the (binary) gender normativity of Tigrayan civil society. The catastrophe of the war opened up an arena for this change.

This article examines how female combatants negotiated the connections and collisions between soldiering and womanhood. It seeks to make three contributions to discourse on the history of women in war: firstly, by investigating the self-presentation of fighter women throughout the war in Ethiopia, it argues that women carefully negotiate their gendered performances during conflict for a desirable outcome. This outcome varied from professional and social rewards in hierarchies of militarism to self-preservation and safety in the face of danger. Secondly, this article puts forward an argument about the enduring influence of a 'fighter' identity on the social positions of women in the post-war era, which required further negotiations of femininity and female roles in the reconstruction period. Recognising the long-term legacies of participation in war on combatant women has wider implications in the historiography beyond the Tigray case to reassess the enduring impact of conflict engagement on women's lives and life trajectories. Finally, this article's methodological reflections on digital qualitative research practices offer a useful addition to contemporary discourse on the ethics and benefits of virtual interview processes during Covid-19 and other global travel instabilities.

2 Tirfe, interview with Francesca Baldwin, Zoom, August 2021.

At its close, this article looks briefly at the current crises engulfing Tigray and the narratives of gender roles that have shaped women's involvement in the new conflict as a so-called necessary and natural continuation of the last. It draws on memories of women's role in previous conflicts to assess the intergenerational shaping of women's narratives of the current Tigray War and the engagement of young women as organisers and leaders in the new crisis. As Tigrayan female combatants have exemplified, women's interactions in the military sphere are neither an interesting footnote, nor an example of exceptionalism, but intricately intertwined with the gendered nature of conflict and catastrophe.

Historicising Conflict in Tigray, 1974–2022

Tigray is the most northern region of Ethiopia, bordering Sudan and Eritrea. It is home to some 6 million people, or roughly 6 per cent of Ethiopia's population. As the fabled home of the Queen of Sheba and the Ark of the Covenant, some see it as the cradle of Ethiopian civilisation, although others emphatically do not.[3] In the past 50 years, Tigray has seen three wars. The first, which is the focus of this article, was a 17-year-long civil war between 1974 and 1991 between TPLF-led resistance groups and the government of the Derg (later known as the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia), a Soviet-backed military junta. The TPLF began in the early 1970s as a small student group, growing into a highly organised populist military insurgency after the Derg's regime of 'red terror' spread throughout the country, fighting to overthrow the military regime and end its repressive ethnic-based policies.[4] The TPLF went on to form a coalition with other liberation groups in Ethiopia, including the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and toppled the Derg in 1991. In the years following, former TPLF leader Meles Zenewi became president (and later prime minister) of the newly formed Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which governed Ethiopia as a multi-ethnic federation for the next 30 years.

3 'Ethiopia – the cradle of mankind and civilization', *All Africa*, 18 June 2015, allafrica.com/stories/201506191183.html; 'Briefing no. 156: Bridging the divide in Ethiopia's north', *International Crisis Group*, 12 June 2020, crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/b156-bridging-divide-ethiopias-north.

4 *The Ethiopian Red Terror Trials: Transitional Justice Challenged*, ed. Kjetil Tronvoll, Charles Schaefer and Girmachew Alemu Aneme (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2009).

A core principle of the EPRDF's 1995 Constitution was that each region had the right for peaceful self-determination:

> Article 39 provides:
>
> (i). Every nation, nationality and people has an unconditional right to self-determination including the right to secession.[5]

This was invoked by Eritrea in 1993, which broke away from the Ethiopian federation to become an independent nation-state. In 1998, however, Tigray's second war of the late twentieth century began over the contested territory of Badme, which was invaded by Eritrea and ruled to be a part of the country by a United Nations (UN) commission in 2002. The Ethio-Eritrea War (1998–2000), as it is known, did not engulf civilians in the same way as the 1974–91 civil war, but contributed to the deeply strained relationship between the neighbouring regions.

In November 2020, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed launched an attack on Tigray for the third time in 50 years after a series of political disputes between Ahmed's ruling Prosperity Party (PP) and the regional government of the TPLF. The latter recalled its representatives to Tigray in August 2020 and held a regional election, in which it won over 90 per cent of the seats.[6] In retaliation for what Ahmed saw as political treason, the prime minister began a 'law and order' operation on Tigray to bring the TPLF in line.[7] This quickly escalated into an attack on all Tigrayans, including civilians. At the time of writing, Tigray has been at war for 19 months and has been blockaded from phone and internet access, partially denied electricity and largely cut off from aid.[8] Some 2 million people have been internally displaced and 70,000 have fled across the border to Sudan, many of whom are displaced by conflict for the second time in their lives having made the same border crossing amid the 1983–85 famine during the war with the Derg. Tigray has mounted a militarised resistance in the form of the Tigray Defence Force (TDF)

5 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Article 39.

6 Giulia Paravicini, 'Regional party wins vote in Ethiopia's Tigray, challenging federal government', *Reuters*, 11 September 2020, reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-politics-idUSKBN2622LA.

7 Abiy Ahmed, 'Operations to restore law and order in Ethiopia's Tigray region', *Embassy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, London, UK*, 24 December 2020, ethioembassy.org.uk/operations-to-restore-law-and-order-in-ethiopias-tigray-region-how-did-we-get-here/.

8 'Northern Ethiopia humanitarian update situation report', *UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs*, 16 June 2022, archived at reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-16-june-2022.

and fighting has spilled over into the rest of the country.[9] This research is driven by the ongoing conflict but primarily framed through the lens of the earlier civil war.

As earlier stated, women comprised up to one-third of active combatants in the TPLF during the civil war. Their roles extended from solider to technician, from political teachers to heath workers, and from strategists and generals to support line workers and community project managers. Their participation is often framed as a watershed moment for gender roles in Tigray and Ethiopia more broadly. Formerly a feudal society, women predominately occupied domestic spaces and were not typically permitted into spaces perceived as masculine, such as politics and war.[10] The TPLF invited women to participate on an equal footing to their male peers for the first time. This was partly an ideologically motivated policy, as the Marxist roots of the TPLF advocated for revised gender expectations, but undoubtedly a logistical necessity as well, as the TPLF faced battle with the Derg's superior numbers and resources.[11]

Female combatants often referred to their dual struggle in their participation in this war: firstly, for liberation from the Derg regime; and, secondly, for emancipation of their gender more broadly through the opportunities provided by the conflict. Women participants in the war effort expected that their contributions would lead to long-term transformative change for gender norms and female representation at all levels. The argument presented in this article, however, is that their engagement in the hierarchies and dynamics of an organised military insurgency necessitated negotiations of gender roles and performances. Their involvement as combatants required ostensible shifts in the behaviours and identities of fighter women, and reframed concepts of femininity and gender normativity within the boundaries of the conflict. This was not a linear progression towards gender equality, as has largely been presented in popular narratives of the war, but a kinetic process of opportunity and reversal, in which women had to make choices about self-presentation for professional and social rewards.

9 Ermias Tasfaye, 'Oromo and Amhara militants battle on western frontier', *Ethiopia Insight*, 1 June 2022, ethiopia-insight.com/2022/06/01/oromo-and-amhara-militants-battle-on-western-frontier/.

10 Jenny Hammond, '"My revolution is like honey": Women in revolutionary Tigray', *Women: A Cultural Review* 1, no. 1 (2008): 56.

11 John Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People's Liberation Front, 1975–1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 90–91.

Gender, War and Ethiopia in the Literature

Feminist history and international relations trends demonstrate the strength of oral approaches to studying women in war.[12] Social anthropologists Jenny Hammond and Thera Mjaaland conducted valuable interviews with women in Tigray, the former during the war itself.[13] Their collections inspired this study and form the foundations upon which this longitudinal, historical contribution has been built. This author departs from the largely linear narratives of changing gender roles in Tigray civil society of Hammond and Mjaaland and approaches the case of Tigrayan female fighters from a historical perspective that takes into account dynamic, multi-layered negotiations of gender performances at different times and places of the war. In this regard, it is influenced by political scientists Beza Negewo Oda, Aaronette M. White and Angela Veale, whose micro-studies of fighter women explore interpretations of femininity, womanhood and gender roles in the Tigrayan context.[14] Other notable works in political science that have informed this study include Sarah Vaughan and others' contributions to intersections between gender and ethnicity in Ethiopia and Tsega Berhe on women's experiences of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) after the war.[15]

There is a small but rich strand of literature on female combatants in small wars in Africa, which Oluwatoyin O. Oluwaniyi claims is dominated by scholarly focus on women supporting men rather than their deliberate choices to commit violence and participate in war.[16]

12 See Chris Coulter, 'Female fighters in the Sierra Leone War: Challenging the assumptions?', *Feminist Review*, no. 88 (2008): 54–73; Chris Coulter, *Bush Wives and Girl Soldiers: Women's Lives Through War and Peace in Sierra Leone* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2013).

13 *Sweeter than Honey: Testimonies of Tigrayan Women*, ed. Jenny Hammond and Nell Druce (London: Links, 1989); Thera Mjaaland, 'At the frontiers of change? Women and girls' pursuit of education in north-western Tigray, Ethiopia' (University of Bergen, PhD thesis, 2013).

14 Beza Negewo-Oda and Aaronette M. White, 'Identity transformation and reintegration among Ethiopian women war veterans: A feminist analysis', *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy* 23, no. 3 (2011): 163–87; Angela Veale, *From Child Solider to Ex-Fighter: Female Fighters, Demobilisation and Reintegration in Ethiopia* (Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2003), 1–29.

15 Sarah Vaughan and Kjetil Tronvoll, 'The culture of power in contemporary Ethiopian political life', *Sida Studies*, no. 10 (2003): 11–21; Tsegay Berhe, *The Tigrean Women in the Liberation Struggle and Aftermath, 1975–1996* (Addis Ababa: Organization for Social Research in Eastern and Southern Africa, 1999).

16 Oluwatoyin O. Oluwaniyi, 'Women's roles and positions in African wars', *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies*, ed. Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso and Toyin Falola (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021): 541–60. See also Leena Vastapuu, illustrated by Emmi Nieminen, *Liberia's Women Veterans: War, Roles and Reintegration* (London: Zed Books, 2018).

In particular, African and Global South feminist scholarship has explored women's contributions and positions in conflict on the continent.[17] Two notable studies include Mokua Ombati on female combatants in the Kenyan Defence Forces, which examines women's inclusion in a necessarily masculine environment as a hierarchy of militarised identities, and Siphokazi Magadla, who differentiates three categories of women in war in South Africa: 'guerrilla girls, combative mothers and the in-betweeners'.[18] This research is particularly relevant as this article similarly explores intersections between age, gender and choices in conflict, as well as the militarisation of motherhood in Tigray.

In history, Gloria Chuku, Alicia Decker and Tanya Lyons have each developed the discipline's purview of how women participate in war, often in hidden spaces.[19] In her work on the Zimbabwean Liberation War, Lyons detailed the glorification of fighter women, which in turn obscured their contributions through supporting roles.[20] Similarly, in her study of women in war in Biafra, Nigeria, Chuku expanded the site of engagement in war beyond the battlefield, to recognise women's critical work in community roles, activism and social cohesion.[21] Although this article explicitly looks at combatant women who took up arms directly, it also reflects on their additional supporting roles as health workers, education facilitators and community leaders. In doing so, it aligns with Lyons and Chuku in their rejection of fixed categories of 'fighters' and the restrictive parameters of the battlefield.

Looking 'beyond the battlefield' is another useful perspective in the theoretical foundations of this article's conceptual interpretations of gender, gender roles, self-presentation, war and militarism. It endeavours

17 Amina Mama and Margo Okazawa-Rey, 'Militarism, conflict and women's activism in the global era: Challenges and prospects for women in three West African contexts', *Feminist Review*, no. 101 (2012): 97–123, 202.

18 Mokua Ombati, 'Feminine masculinities in the military: The case of female combatants in the Kenya Defence Forces' operation in Somalia', *African Security Review* 24, no. 4 (2015): 403–13; Siphokazi Magadla, 'Women combatants and the liberation movements in South Africa: Guerrilla girls, combative mothers and the in-betweeners', *African Security Review* 24, no. 4 (2015): 390–402.

19 Gloria Chuku, 'Women and the Nigerian-Biafra War', in *Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide: The Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967–1970*, ed. A. Dirk Moses and Lasse Heerten (Oxford: Routledge, 2018), 329–59; Alicia C. Decker, *In Idi Amin's Shadow: Women, Gender, and Militarism in Uganda* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2014); Tanya Lyons, 'Guerrilla girls and women in the Zimbabwean national liberation struggle', in *Women in African Colonial Histories*, ed. Jean Allman, Susan Geiger and Nakanyike Musisi (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 305–26.

20 Lyons, 'Guerrilla girls and women'.

21 Chuku, 'Women and the Nigerian-Biafra War'.

to propose a re-exploration of female fighter's gender identity, influenced by the pioneering work of Judith Butler, Cynthia Enloe and Jacklyn Cock.[22] As feminist theories of gender in conflict will be deployed throughout this article, it is useful to briefly clarify here the working meanings of the language chosen in this work. Firstly, this study follows Cock's definition of militarism as the ideological foundation of militaries and militarised actions.[23] A key argument put forward by Mama and Okazawa-Rey in this context is that militarism, as a 'gendered and gendering phenomenon, persists long after "peace" has been officially declared'.[24] This has far-reaching implications for understanding the continuing legacies of conflict participation of demobilised women. In addition, the use of the term 'patriarchy' here is consistent with Enloe's definition as a structural system that perpetuates the privileging of masculinity and associated traits.[25] This is relevant as the article explores the dual process for women to transition from civilian to soldier *and* from woman to soldier. Finally, binary references will be made to categories of 'man' and 'woman' as separate, culturally defined entities. This is not intended to obscure the existence of infinite genders, as this author explicitly recognises, but to develop a framework for understanding performances of gender identity as a continuum between intelligible gendered categories, which can be adapted and negotiated depending on where and with whom a person is interacting. These terms also reflect the language used by interview participants and the gender normativity of Tigrayan civil society.

Methodology: Digital Oral History Methods

Methodologically, this research is fundamentally an oral history project. Life-history interviews with former fighters, activists, community leaders and survivors of both wars in the diaspora have been carried out with the aim of recording and preserving women's memories of civil conflict in Tigray in their own words. Between December 2020 and April 2022, 28 interviews were carried out with women in Tigray, the United

22 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Cynthia Enloe, *The Curious Feminist: Searching for Women in a New Age of Empire* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004); *War and Society: The Militarisation of South Africa*, ed. Jacklyn Cock and Laurie Nathan (Cape Town: David Philip, 1989).

23 Cock and Nathan, *War and Society*, 2.

24 Mama and Okazawa-Rey, 'Militarism, conflict and women's activism', 100.

25 Enloe, *The Curious Feminist*, 4.

Kingdom, the United States, Kenya, Sweden, France and Australia. As this research was conducted during the restrictions imposed by the global pandemic and the ongoing Tigray War, all interviews were conducted on the video meeting platforms Zoom and Telegram to ensure participant safety and allow for long-distance meetings.

Other scholars have confirmed the potential of videoconferencing platforms to collect qualitative data, during the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond.[26] Although this medium presents a number of challenges in ethics and interviewer–interviewee relationships and restricts non-verbal communications during interviews, it is nonetheless a valuable platform for modern oral history practice when used carefully.

A digital approach was necessary to include global participants and to access key voices from within Tigray, which lacks consistent internet access, but this author found video meetings enabled constructive working relationships. Conferencing software allowed the researcher to have multiple meetings, ask follow-up questions and build upon transcripts at different stages of the Tigray War (2020–present). Encrypted voice notes were used occasionally with participants in Tigray to enable information to be shared safely and at a time feasible for the participant struggling with connection. The record function on Zoom facilitated an easy, transparent recording process, without the physical reminder of a recorder during a face-to-face interview. This author found this helped put participants at ease and encouraged them to focus less on the recording device as compared with in-person interviews.

Interviews lasted between one and a half and two hours. Each took the form of a life history interview, where participants were asked broad questions about their life trajectory and targeted follow-up questions depending on what their answers revealed. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 69, all identifying as female. Following Sherna Gluck's definition of oral history interviews as a feminist encounter, the research sought to centre women's lived experiences and ensure the inclusion of marginalised perspectives in a discourse in which humanitarian actors and international conflict-resolution bodies often speak on behalf of

26 J. Kessa Roberts, Alexandra E. Pavlakis and Meredith P. Richards, 'It's more complicated than it seems: Virtual qualitative research in the COVID-19 era', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 20 (2021), doi.org/10.1177%2F16094069211002959; Elliane Irani, 'The use of videoconferencing for qualitative interviewing: Opportunities, challenges, and considerations', *Clinical Nursing Research* 28, no. 1 (2018): 3–8.

affected women, rather than consulting them directly. It must be noted that the ongoing communication blackout in Tigray has made it very difficult to engage with those who have remained in the region since the start of the war. Although some testimonies have been collected via secure VPN servers, voices of women in Tigray are largely missing. While there is no compensation for the omission of these testimonies, the lens of diasporic women who are participating in the new Tigray War from their international bases disrupts our understandings of a 'fighter' beyond physical presence on a battlefield and reveals the complex, transformative ways in which women engage in and shape the parameters of war.

A Lioness and a Mother: Reconciling Femininity and Soldiering

The meaning of the term 'female combatant' is mutable. Definitions are situationally, spatially and temporally bound. A core directive of the TPLF's military policy was that women were able to take up arms and participate in battle on equal positioning to their male counterparts. Beyond the role of soldier, however, women were also considered combatants if they dedicated themselves to the war effort in other areas. They were trained as technicians, drivers, health workers and political actors at a community and regional level. Some women were given positions as local interlocuters and were responsible for interfacing between village residents and the TPLF to communicate needs and negotiate the terms of military presence in the area. Their long-term engagement in the war, affiliation with the TPLF as an insurgent force and transient lifestyle encompassed them within the category of female combatant during this time. Many rose to critical leadership positions in both the political and military wings of the TPLF and redefined boundaries and expectations of women's roles in war.

Nonetheless, participating as a combatant required a reframing of the culturally defined category of womanhood in Tigray. Formal policies prohibiting marriage and sexual relations between combatants until the late 1980s required women to suspend their expected life trajectories of marriage and motherhood. Many transformed their appearance until they were nearly unrecognisable as women at all. Military dress meant *tegadelti* (fighter or struggler in the feminine plural) were amongst the only women to wear trousers in rural areas and most cropped their hair short for ease and practicality in the field. Their presentations and roles

initially took civilians by surprise, especially elders from rural locations. One participant, Genet, remembered her interactions with local residents after she joined the TPLF:

> The women would say, 'Why are you here? Why wouldn't you stay with your mum and marry and then have children? Why are you with these men? You sleep with them? Don't they—do they do something to you?'—because we sleep together with men. I was the only girl among boys. You don't! First of all, you are there to fight, you are not there for romanticism or whatever—you don't even think, because that's not in your head at all. You are comrades and fully, truly seeking justice. You are not there about sex or anything else … And so the women used to get fascinated.[27]

The 'fascination' Genet described depicts how far female fighters challenged expectations of womanhood and women's life trajectories in Tigray. Although she is adamant that romantic and/or sexual relationships were not in the interests of serving combatants, her intimacy with her male peers was highly unusual for an unmarried woman. In colloquial discussions, other participants have alluded to the fact that women in predominately male units were occasionally accused of asexuality by friends and family. In Genet's testimony, female members of the TPLF appear to have prioritised their commitment to the cause above expectations of female behaviour in a rejection of popular expectations of female desires. Several fighters describe being asked by civilians in the villages they entered to show their breasts to prove their identity, or residents would not believe they were female at all.

Judith Butler coined the idea that gender requires a doing.[28] In this view, gender is a fundamentally unstable and performative act, wherein one re-enacts expectations of gender normativity in order to uphold intelligible identifications of binary categories of 'man' and 'women'. Combatant women appear to identify with this concept of performing gender for a professional and social reward as their participation required a shift in verbal and non-verbal behaviours to integrate into the military unit. They adapted their clothing, speech, mannerisms, distorted hierarchies of gender and age and were determined not to let their femininity present as weakness. In the early stages of the war, when fewer women joined

27 Genet interview with Francesca Baldwin, Zoom, February 2022.

28 Judith Butler, 'Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory', *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519–31.

the frontline, Marta described the additional measures taken by female fighters to match and, in some instances, surpass expectations of male soldiers to justify their presence in the unit:

> All women fighters, we participate everywhere. Even hard, even easy, we didn't say we were not able to do it. We say, 'we'll do it', and we do it. We did it. From small group to big group, we made the organisation in every department—we have a lot of departments to carry the war—every department we have leaders. Woman leaders. And they work like a man. There is no difference.[29]

Marta joined the TPLF as a young, single woman from a rural location and progressed to be a military leader, before being shot and sent away for recovery. She describes her limited prospects before the war, when she had only partial access to education and training. Her perceived obligation to prove that women's capacity was no different to men's is confirmed by Genet, who travelled from the capital, Addis Ababa, to join the TPLF as a student.

> I became one of the young girls from Addis, at that time, the first one. Because there were local Tigrayans, who were—who have joined the army, but there were no girls from the city. So myself and another Eritrean lady who left a six month old child—she was a married woman …
>
> One of the men [also joining up] was struggling to walk these mountains—for me it was just adventure … And then you go and spend the night at a peasant's house. There is no electricity. There is no bed. You have no bed you just (*gestures foetal position*) and you sometimes—it was just tough. I can't remember how many days it took us—three days, maybe? Or whatever, because some of the men could not walk.[30]

Genet and Marta took care to dismiss gendered barriers to participation as fighters. In Genet's testimony, she goes as far as to note male deficiencies in comparison to her experience. This is telling as we consider how feminist theorists in history and international relations have investigated the dynamics of states and militaries as deeply gendered social institutions, underpinned by militarism as the ideological structure of war and militaries, which privileges masculinity and its associated traits—discipline, stamina,

29 Marta, interview with Francesca Baldwin, Zoom, December 2021.
30 Genet interview.

stoicism and so on—while gentleness and submission are used to degrade opponents through association with femininity. The belief that the feminine is subordinate to the masculine in this way directly implicates female combatants in negotiations of power and hierarchy. In other words, the very values, practices and systems of militaries problematise participation of women as women. Consequently, the performance of a female combatant required a remediation of conceptual categories of gender in order to reconcile them with the demands of the military arena.

Marta was keen to stress that there was 'no difference' between men and women as fighters. Oda and White have interpreted this language in other combatant testimonies as an example of 'androgyny'.[31] The argument put forward here, however, is that this obscuration of gendered difference is a deliberate effort to downplay femininity and present as closely to male fighters as possible. Female combatants recognised the professional and social opportunities of assimilation into their masculine, militarised units. They display clear awareness of the expectation that women are weaker or slower and are conscious in their intention to disprove that categorisation. In doing so, they make a choice about which qualities and identity markers to stress—strength, leadership, resilience, appetite for adventure—and which to soften: discomfort, fear or, as suggested in Genet's testimony, post-natal physical challenges.

The hierarchy of militarism female combatants faced is also evidenced overtly in the way performances of gender were renegotiated in order to render female fighters' participation a legitimate representation of womanhood. Mjaaland observed that female fighters were referred to as *haras nebri* or *harasat anabïr* (plural), which they interpret as meaning 'breastfeeding tiger'.[32] The literal translation, however, is that of a fierce big cat, such as a lion, tiger or puma, who has just given birth. Linguistic experts agree the reference in this context is most likely to a lioness, which is in line with the numerous artistic depictions that parallel Tigrayan women and the *panthera leo* species. As the aforementioned policy preventing combatant sexual relations meant most women did not tend to have children during their service, the *harasat anabïr* analogy refers to the increased ferocity of a lioness after birth. In order to protect her young, a lioness will fight harder, faster and be more deadly. In this way, femininity was reframed to be resolved with the demands of soldiering.

31 Negewo-Oda and White, 'Identity transformation and reintegration', 180.
32 Mjaaland, 'At the frontiers of change', 255.

Women engaging in violence were excused from departing from their (so-called) nurturing and peaceful roles and their behaviour legitimised through the narrative of motherhood. Their fight and resilience were conceptualised as a natural female response to a threat to their young, in this sense meaning all children in Tigray. Their position was sanctioned by framing soldier behaviour and choices not as an example of initiative and capacity for violence, but as a natural demonstration of female sacrifice and maternal instinct.

The *harasat anabïr* analogy embodies the ways in which gender and gender norms are mediated through and by conflict arenas. Reconciling femininity and militarism required careful negotiations of performances of gender and of expectations of womanhood in Tigray. This was taken further by the deliberate obscuration of the monthly menstrual cycle by female fighters. Oda noted that combatant women were supposed to tell their physician when they had their periods and be excused from participating in battle, but most lied and pretended they were not bleeding so as not to be left out of the activity.[33] When this was brought up with an interview participant and former fighter, Sofia, she laughed and joked that she remembered how women pretended to be too malnourished to menstruate and the male physicians believed them.[34] Marta, meanwhile, remembers her menstruation as the only gendered obstacle to her participation:

> In our struggle, the hardest thing was that [periods]. Because you don't have water to wash, the cotton will be dry. And that is the hardest one. But the rest, we are the same as everyone. We didn't stay from anything. We worked the same. And they respect us too. Because we work hard, they respect. Even the enemy, they scared for womans [sic].[35]

In these instances, female identity markers were downplayed, carefully moderated or deliberately obscured as Sofia remembers. Meanwhile, in other directives of the war effort, female combatants performed femininity overtly to reach their professional goals. Genet recalled her unorthodox route to join the TPLF as a young woman:

33 Negewo-Oda and White, 'Identity transformation and reintegration', 175.
34 Sofia, interview with Francesca Baldwin, Zoom, March 2021.
35 Marta interview.

> G: You know, to get there was dangerous. We had to disguise ourselves as something else. As prostitutes … It's two days journey by coach. And the coaches are searched … The idea we were given was prostitutes. So we will be harassed in the coach, because when they see you are a prostitute—so you have to dress like a prostitute otherwise, you know, it was danger.
>
> F: So you dressed as a prostitute to travel there?
>
> G: We dressed as a prostitute, so they just think you are with the prostitutes, kind of. Because it was a matter of life and death. So that is—even from the bus we were going—they were taking out many young boys and just shoot them. Just terrible! You know, sometimes when people say, 'Oh why do you join this, why do you do this?', when you are at life and death, you have no idea what you will choose. What you choose is life. All the time.[36]

This is a telling revelation from Genet, which she narrated fondly despite the obvious danger. Her decision to present as a prostitute allowed her to exploit social presumptions about the unthreatening, dismissible nature of female sexuality. As a woman selling sex, she was able to move under the radar of patrolling enemy soldiers who would perhaps not anticipate political agency from young sex workers. In this journey, Genet faced arrest and even execution if discovered. Utilising her sexuality was a means of self-preservation in this instance. Her observation that she chose 'life' through this presentation is indicative of how far careful gendered performance was a valuable tool for women in this war.

Sofia took part in military training and some battles as a fighter in the early years of the war, but later transferred to be a go-between for the TPLF and civilian populations. She was tasked with recruiting more women to join the movement, and with reassuring the civilian population that the TPLF meant to bring peace, stability and progress. Presenting as a woman was integral to this role. Sofia intended to appear non-threatening, measured and trustworthy. She sought to use her gender to connect with the local population as an intelligible representation of the opportunities for women within the TPLF, without disrupting social normativity and alienating conservative support bases. Sofia's case embodies the concept of gender as an instrument for female fighters in this war in her careful presentation and renegotiation of her identity for professional, personal and political outcomes.

36 Genet interview.

Liminality and Language: A Veteran, an 'Ex' or a Former?

In 1991, the war ended in victory for the TPLF. They had successfully overthrown the Derg and established the multi-ethnic federation of the EPRDF. At this time, combatant women began a process of demilitarisation, a concept introduced in this context to refer to the journey wherein one becomes separated from the military system. Although duly celebrated for their contributions, as the new government began to reform and rebuild civil society, demilitarised women experienced a push towards more socially familiar behaviours and roles. They were no longer required as soldiers and, instead, controlling their political, social, economic and reproductive activities became central to the peacebuilding process. Women's agricultural land use rights, originally a hallmark policy of the TPLF during the mobilisation phase of the war, were significantly restricted during the latter stages of the war under the pretext that 'ploughing just added to women's already overstretched workload'.[37] In this context, efforts to reconstruct a society from disorder relied on the return of recognisable gender normativity to secure the restoration of social cohesion and expectations of a peaceful, secure, orderly nation.

Legitimations of gender, as this article has argued, were reframed to allow for women's active participation in conflict and violence. In the post-war arena, however, such expectations were again redefined to reflect the needs and cohesion of the reconstructing nation. Combatant women's appearance, behaviours, mannerisms and experiences were, in peacetime, presented as gender nonconformity. Although commended for their participation, they were set apart and othered from civilian femininity, in an expression of marginality.[38]

While the political education and vocational training available to all combatants recommended reintegrating male soldiers for roles in peace, this was not the case for female fighters. Their skills and experiences were not easily reconciled with expectations of gender normativity in post-war Ethiopia. Marta recalled:

37 Mjaaland, 'At the frontiers of change', 49.

38 Giuseppe Mazzotta, 'Frontiers of thought out of the margins', *The European Legacy: Towards New Paradigms* 17, no. 6 (2012): 745–54.

> When I go to field, the struggle, I was ninth grade. When I came back, I start again, ninth grade. And I complete twelfth grade. I was working with the computers, it was hard work, and I am a mum at that time.[39]

This was a particular struggle for Marta who had become accustomed to her leadership role in the TPLF. For other demobilised fighters who chose to reintegrate into their pre-war communities in Tigray rather than the capital Addis Ababa, the challenges of renegotiating gender norms and behaviours were intensified. Family expectations and socialisation to familiar concepts of gender normativity created a difficult space for returning women to navigate. This was compounded by the fact that many such women had not experienced the projected trajectories of marriage and motherhood and surpassed the typical age at which women underwent such coming-of-age rites of passage in Tigray. Compared with their peers without a military background, reintegrating women presented as diametrically opposed to civilian women. This is reinforced in a survey Elise Barth conducted in neighbouring Eritrea, which collaborated closely with the TPLF and where women also formed a high percentage of the fighting forces.[40] Barth's study revealed that former female fighters largely went on to marry male former combatants and rarely married men without a military background. By contrast, former male combatants mostly married civilian women. The implication of these data is that combatant men tended to prefer the behaviours and femininity of civilian women, while combatant women found less acceptance of their experiences and expressions in civilian men than in their military comrades.

The concept of liminality is relevant in this context. Coined by anthropologist Arnold van Gennep and developed by Victor Turner to denote rites of passage representing a state of 'no longer' and 'not yet', liminality is a shifting process: the betwixt and between.[41] It is a transitional state between intelligible categories and roles, not separate from but not within the bounds of those categories. Liminality could, as an example, apply to adolescents transitioning between childhood and adulthood. Here, the concept is useful to critically examine reintegration; that is, women who are no longer combatants but not yet non-combatants.

---

39 Marta interview.

40 Elise Fredrikke Barth, *Peace as Disappointment: The Reintegration of Female Soldiers in Post-Conflict Societies: A Comparative Study from Africa* (Olso: PRIO International Peace Research Institute, 2002).

41 Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (London: Kegan & Paul, 1960); Victoria Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London: Kegan & Paul, 1969).

Its connection with the use of language to refer to female fighters since the end of the war is revealing. They are rarely called veterans, except in the context of some non-governmental organisations. Ex-fighter is not usually applicable either, as the 'ex' implies dishonour or dismissal to former fighters. Former combatant is the preferred English language term, holding a connection to the subject's previous experience, but it is the Tigrinya, majority language, word for women in 'The Struggle' (the name used by many fighters to refer to the war) that speaks volumes. *Tegadalit* is translated as fighter or struggler in the present continuous. It literally refers to someone who *is* a fighter woman, not someone who was in the past, despite over 30 years passing since the end of the civil war. Women claim to be *tegadalit*, or are assigned such distinction by their communities, in post-war Tigray in order to make sense of their experiences. Liminality theory posits that identities are kinetic, changeable depending on where and with whom a person is interacting. An enduring *tegadalit* identity gives women the space for expression and differentiation from peacetime gender normativity. It signals that their combatant status has not reached a fixed end and continues to be used as an identity marker affecting social interactions and self-expression.

> Reflecting, then, on post-war performances of gender, the connections between social cohesion, femininity and hierarchy merit analysis of the category of former fighter women. The cropped haircuts and trousers which were worn with pride during the war were slowly grown out and thrown out in a physical enactment of the gradual but necessary shift for combatant women to reintegrate as women, again measured by the normativity of civil society. They reframed expressions of their gender once more, seeking peaceful assimilation and acceptance. Samrawit described her transition performance as follows: '[When you come back] you have to live with the society as well, you live the same way. You have to talk about and act like that [sic]. It is backwards. Backwards. But you want to be the same society. So you live as the same way [sic]'.[42]

For Samrawit, her experiences of the conflict and political education had been an awakening to progressive politics that she could not forget. Her reintegration with those who had not experienced the conflict as she had was, to her, 'backwards'. Yet, she describes having to live the same way as directed by the peacetime community, shifting her expectations

42 Samrawit, interview by Francesca Baldwin, Zoom, March 2021.

and behaviours accordingly. This goes some way to account for the notable lack of female expression of their conflict memories and illustrates clearly the influence of social cohesion on personal identity. Participating in culturally recognisable performances of femininity required fighter women to revise the boundaries of their gender norms or else be confined to social fringes. It is interesting to consider the connections between liminality and marginality in this context; both are spatial concepts involving perimeters and limits but can be viewed as the flip side of one another.[43] If liminality is a dynamic middle-ground, marginality is defined by its distance from the centre. In social spaces, non-conforming women occupy marginal sites, set apart from the hub of 'women's activities' in the home and community.[44] Combatant women's gender can exist in a state of both liminality and marginality, sometimes simultaneously, and often contradictorily. The critical point is that their gender exists and is enacted in these spaces in response to their environment. It is a landscape in which *tegadelti* (plural) can perform their selves and redefine what it means to be a soldier and a woman.

A Final Reflection: Womanhood and the New Tigray War (2020–present)

Across Ethiopia, women are presented as protectors of history, of culture and of nationalism, and this has ultimately manifested in placing meaning on and within the female body. Women have been encouraged to only reproduce within their ethnic distinction, while the post-war era has also seen a rise in discriminatory gendered practices such as female genital mutilation as an ethnic boundary marker.[45] Although this latter practice is not widely undertaken in Tigray, it is an example of how political devolution has manifested in regulations of the female body and women deriving meaning through their ethnic distinctions.

In the Tigray War (2020–present), sexual violence and gender-based violence have been weaponised to some of the furthest extremes in the contemporary world. At the time of writing, the United Nations Population Fund has estimated over 26,000 women have been subjected

43 Mazzotta, 'frontiers of thought out of the margins', 478.
44 Sofia interview.
45 Vaughan and Tronvoll, 'The culture of power', 47–48.

to sexual violence and rape.[46] As this type of violence is chronically underreported and many of the facilities necessary for safehouses and treatment have been destroyed in the conflict, this is likely a conservative estimate of those affected. Sexual slavery, gang rape, mutilation with objects, forced incest and extreme sexual brutality have characterised the attacks on civilians, with humanitarian reports naming the perpetrators of the violence as the Ethiopian National Defence Force, the Eritrean Defence Fore, Amhara Regional Police Special Forces (ASF) and Fano, an informal Amhara militia group.[47]

The female body has become a landscape of negotiation for identity and meaning in this war. Decisions about boundaries of the 'other' and definitions of the 'self' have been played out on and within the female body by shaping its relationship to identity politics. That this has led to extreme gendered violence is indicative of the need to critically unpack the roots and manifestations of dangerous constructions of gender normativity, where such categories may—and can—create a permissive environment for gender-based violence during conflict on any scale, domestic or organised.

The particular place of women in Tigray's history, specifically their contributions to the civil war, is worth considering as one reason why women and girls are being targeted through the intensification of gender-based violence in this war. Violating and destroying women, when women have been central to Tigray's story, is a strong message of violation and destruction of Tigray's history. Have women been attacked in this war because they represent the essence of Tigray: its history, its values and its promises? More specifically, has the dual struggle for liberation and the presence of women as leaders in combat, in politics and in law under the TPLF created a unique position for women that this violence has sought to undermine? This research is asking whether the female combatants of the 1974–91 civil war, who decisively disrupted gender normativity and expectations of gender roles, are in fact linked to the choice to enact gender-based violence broadly and systematically in this war.

46 'UNFPA Ethiopa response to the Tigray crisis: Situation report', 15–30 June 2021, *UNFPA Ethiopia.*

47 '"I don't know if they realized I was a person": Rape and sexual violence in the conflict in Tigray, Ethiopia', 11 August 2021, *Amnesty International*, amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/4569/2021/en/.

Former fighter Samrawit took this idea further and claimed those known to have participated in the TPLF have been specifically targeted by the coalition forces:

> Some of them are killed, my best friend killed, and friends, a lot of friends killed … Even [though] they are not participating in the war because they are fighters, Tigrayan fighters, they have to be killed, they have to be arrested … Tigray is in a war again and then, this time, my friends will be retired, should be in rest, again they are in the war … because they [former fighters] are progressive, they want to destroy the—the intelligent—the progressive people. They want to destroy our culture. They want to destroy our heritage. These people are our heritage.[48]

Again, the idea of a *tegadalit* in the present continuous is relevant. Although officially demilitarised nearly 30 years ago, participation in the civil war remains a relevant and potentially dangerous identity marker on account of connotations of leadership, skills and knowledge. Marta confirmed the legacies of female fighters in Tigray, who are once again being recruited in significant numbers:

> The best girls of Tigray are the ones who fought and brought justice in Tigray. Those girls of Tigray are today, you see, chasing, you know, the cruel and barbaric armies of Abiy Ahmed.[49]

Here, Marta makes a clear association between combatant status, heroism and honour. For Marta, it is the 'best girls' who take up the responsibility to engage in war and rise in the footsteps of the fighters who came before. In this way, the legacy of the civil war continues to inform the dynamics, patterns and parameters of the current conflict. It has set out the terms of the violence, but also the terms of the organisational response. In particular, the strength with which young women have mobilised for action draws heavily on gendered historical narratives to lend direction and weight to their activities. Every female interview participant engaged in activism in the diaspora referenced the categorisation of Tigrayan women as meaning something inherently different from other categorisations of womanhood. The new conflict has re-mediated the arena for women's participation and legitimised their engagement as historic gender norms, as Nayna, a young activist in the diaspora, confirmed:

48 Samrawit interview.

49 Marta interview. See also '"We don't have a limit": Yasuyoshi Chiba – agency photographer of 2021', *Guardian*, 23 December 2021, theguardian.com/artanddesign/2021/dec/23/we-dont-have-a-limit-yasuyoshi-chiba-agency-photographer-of-2021.

> This isn't the first war; this isn't the first struggle. The others have seen women play really instrumental roles … I think Tigrayan women are a particular brand of fierce, and fierce protectors as well … [they have an] unshakeable strength that I've never seen before. All of us have mothers, grandmothers, aunts, that are like this. You're just a by-product of what you've seen.[50]

Nayna's testimony reflects the ways in which gender has been renegotiated again through and by catastrophe. It speaks, firstly, to the strength of history as method of mobilisation. By framing women's engagement as 'instrumental', their place in the conflict appears natural and necessary. Secondly, it reflects the persistent relevance of the civil war on women in Tigray as the landscape of womanhood is framed through generational legacies of conflict participation, which continues to permeate the roles, boundaries and possibilities of gender normativity in Tigray.

Conclusion

The existence of female fighters, as both active conflict participants and demilitarised combatants, has required renegotiations of gender performances in Tigray in present and past conflicts. The legitimisation of female engagement in war has dictated representations of femininity in soldiers, while the gendered order necessitated by social cohesion has marginalised and othered those presenting gender nonconformity post-war. Combatant women in Tigray carefully negotiated their self-presentation during and after conflict to navigate hierarchies of militarism, expectations of civilian femininity and reintegration needs. The endurance of their *tegadalit* identity illustrates the challenges of settling into safe social spaces post-war. Finally, the response from Tigrayan women to mobilise for the current war effort has been indelibly shaped by historical legacies of women's involvement in war in Tigray. In summation, these oral history interviews provide insight into the lives of Tigrayan combatant women and reveal the multiple, kinetic ways in which women are able to mediate presentations of their gender during war. As the war in Tigray continues, further research into the long-term impact of combatant status on women in the region becomes all the more timely and necessary.

50 Nayna, interview by Francesca Baldwin, Zoom, July 2021.

Sex, Soap and Silk: Japanese Businesswomen in North Queensland, 1887–1941

Tianna Killoran[1]
James Cook University

Abstract

Few historians have considered Japanese women in northern Australia beyond their role as impoverished sex workers, overlooking their entrepreneurial activities in the sex industry as well as in laundries and shops. This article adds to research by Su-Jane Hunt (1977) and Yuriko Nagata (2004) about Japanese women who were entrepreneurs and community members in Western Australia and the Torres Strait, incorporating more detail about their business activities throughout north Queensland, both within the sex industry and outside it. A mosaic of newly accessible documentary sources—including newspaper, immigration and internment records—provides the foundation for a more complex history of Japanese women and their roles in the economic life of north Queensland between 1887 and 1941. This material reveals that Japanese women worked in partnership with their husbands, or sometimes as sole operators, to manage and run businesses such as brothels, laundries, stores and even cafes. Not all Japanese women were in business, but discussing those who undertook business activities invites us to cast aside the 'moral suspicion' that has loomed over these women's stories. The reality of their lives was far more interesting.

1 My greatest appreciation to Catherine Bishop for her thoughtful and generous feedback on drafts of this article, with thanks also to my anonymous peer-reviewer. I would also like to acknowledge my supervisors Claire Brennan and Russell McGregor for their feedback and support, my fellow James Cook University postgraduates for their encouragement, and finally the editorial collective at *Lilith* for their improvements on this article.

Beyond Framing Japanese Women as Sex Workers

In 1897, Commissioner of Police W. E. Parry-Okeden reported that 116 Japanese women were living in Queensland, and—with the exception of the Japanese consul's wife—all of them 'gain[ed] their living by prostitution'.[2] This confident statement was referenced by historian David Sissons in his ground-breaking 1977 work 'Karayuki-san: Japanese prostitutes in Australia, 1887–1916', which remains the only focused treatise on the history of Japanese sex workers in Australia to this day.[3] Sissons's work repeated this 'largely accepted' number with few criticisms; however, historian Regina Ganter has since thoroughly debunked the commissioner's estimate. The commissioner seemed to have forgotten that other staff at the Japanese Consulate in Townsville had also brought their wives with them.[4] Ganter's rebuttal further cited an 1895 report from the sub-inspector of police on Thursday Island who claimed that among 23 Japanese women living there, nine were 'single' and therefore 'prostitutes', while a remaining 12 were married, one widowed and one a child.[5] This report contradicted the commissioner's estimate, and as Ganter succinctly summarised, highlights a mistaken assumption often made by Queensland police and the historians who reference their reports: 'the implication here is that single (Japanese) women were prostitutes and, in reports less grounded in detail, this implication became generalised for all Japanese women'.[6] The label of 'prostitute' hence became the story of Japanese women who migrated to north Queensland between 1887 and 1941, when the outbreak of the Pacific War resulted in the internment and

2 Commissioner of Police to the Under Secretary Home Department, 14 September 1897, ID 861851, SRS 5384, Queensland State Archives (hereafter QSA).

3 David Sissons, 'Karayuki-san: The Japanese prostitutes in Australia, 1887–1916 (I & II)', in *Bridging Australia and Japan: The Writings of David Sissons, Historian and Political Scientist*, ed. Keiko Tamura and Arthur Stockwin, vol. 1 (1977; Canberra: ANU Press, 2016), 174, doi.org/10.22459/BAJ.12.2016.

4 Regina Ganter, 'The Wakayama triangle: Japanese heritage of North Australia', *Journal of Australian Studies* 23, no. 61 (1999): 57.

5 Please note that this article uses the preferred term of 'sex worker' except in instances where 'prostitute' or 'prostitution' are part of direct quotes.

6 Ganter, 'The Wakayama triangle', 57; Regina Ganter, 'Coloured people: A challenge to racial stereotypes', in *Navigating Boundaries: The Asian Diaspora in Torres Strait*, ed. Anna Shnukal, Guy Malcolm Ramsay and Yuriko Nagata (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2004), 242, fn. 4. Ganter's reference to this source has a typographical error. The original can be found at the QSA (PRE/102). The inspector also claims that all married women 'led immoral lives' before marriage.

subsequent forced 'repatriation' of all Japanese nationals. This labelling of Japanese women has effectively marginalised their role in the history of the region.

Ganter's 1999 work laid the foundation for a reanalysis of Japanese women's roles. With the availability of more archival sources today and increasingly accessible digitised records, it becomes clear that while some may have been sex workers, there is much more to the history of Japanese women in north Queensland.[7] It is difficult to establish the total number of Japanese women in this region between 1887 and 1941, but my research has been able to identify the names and circumstances of 77 women who lived here during this period. Of these, at least one-third were businesswomen, and it is likely that up to half of those who conducted business activities were independent or sole operators at one point.[8] Although these business activities may have been intermittent, short-term or even illegal, this article takes on Jennifer Aston's and Catherine Bishop's expansive definition of a businesswoman as someone who was responsible for making business decisions, seizing opportunities and assuming the responsibility and risk of their activities, however small or large they may have been.[9] A mosaic of records—including newspaper articles, advertisements, family histories and government documents—paints a biographical and economic picture of individual Japanese women's lives and allows the historian to construct a story of the complex and varied pattern of their experiences.[10] It is likely that up to 20 of these women were involved in the management of businesses around north Queensland in partnership with a husband, operating laundries, silk stores, boarding

7 Since the 2000s, a significant number of records at the National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA) have been made available because the open access period has been reached. The advantage of keyword searches in the NAA and Trove databases, for example, has made identifying and researching Japanese women more possible. For a detailed guide to NAA records relating to Japanese migrants in Australia, see Pam Oliver, *Allies, Enemies and Trading Partners: Records on Australia and the Japanese* (Canberra: National Archives of Australia, 2004).

8 This has been estimated through a collection of archival sources, primarily from the NAA. These include, for the most part, the series: J2483: Certificates Exempting from the Dictation Test; BP4/3: Alien Registration Forms; and MP1103/2: Dossiers Containing Reports on Internees and Prisoners of War held in Australian Camps. Identified women have been correlated with other available sources such as newspapers accessed via Trove, police records and the Queensland Births, Deaths and Marriages register.

9 Jennifer Aston and Catherine Bishop, 'Discovering a global perspective', in *Female Entrepreneurs in the Long Nineteenth Century: A Global Perspective*, ed. Jennifer Aston and Catherine Bishop (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 5.

10 James Warren, *Pirates, Prostitutes and Pullers: Explorations in the Ethno- and Social History of Southeast Asia* (Perth: UWA Press, 2008), 225–27.

houses and smallholder farms, while a slightly smaller number of women were 'single' but independent, mobile and adaptable in their business activities. Some may have never been involved in the sex industry, and it appears that Japanese brothels began to decline after the turn of the century while some aging or widowed women transitioned to retail and domestic business into the 1920s and 1930s.

Japanese women began arriving in Australia in the latter half of the nineteenth century, with the first three women noted by the Japanese honorary consul, Alexander Marks, in 1887. Departing Japan during a time of rapid—and uneven—industrialisation and transformation, these women were often leaving behind poverty in isolated rural villages.[11] Those who came to north Queensland found themselves in a place that supported thriving multicultural communities. The region was home to one of the largest populations of Japanese migrants during this period, with an estimated 60 per cent—approximately 2,255 people—living throughout Queensland in 1901. This number accounted for just under 1 per cent of the total Queensland population, although these numbers decreased in the following decades.[12] North Queensland hosted a range of industries and interconnected communities that supported a highly mobile population in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This diversity contrasted with more isolated parts of northern Australia where social organisation was framed by the pearl shelling industry, such as in Broome and Darwin. In north Queensland, Japanese migrants were involved in local communities through pearl shelling and sugar cane farming and were highly interconnected with trading centres of the south and trading routes throughout Asia in the north. Even within White Australia, a combination of exemptions and substantial pre-1901 migration meant large populations of non-European migrants and Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal peoples continued to live and work in the region, participating in communities that were multicultural and cooperative. Relationships within these communities were also characterised by simmering racial tensions, with many people experiencing

11 Sissons, 'Karayuki-san', 178, 187. This is the earliest date that Japanese women were identified as living in Australia, although some may have arrived earlier than this.

12 David Sissons, 'The Lady Rowena and the Eamont: The 19th century', in *Bridging Australia and Japan: The Writings of David Sissons, Historian and Political Scientist*, ed. Keiko Tamura and Arthur Stockwin, vol. 1 (Canberra: ANU Press, 2016), 95, doi.org/10.22459/BAJ.12.2016; Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Data Archive, Len Smith, Tim Rowse, and Stuart Hungerford, 'Historical and colonial census data archive (HCCDA)', ADA Dataverse, 2021, doi.org/10.26193/MP6WRS.

social and legal exclusion from other aspects of north Queensland life.[13] The diverse economic, geographic and multi-ethnic characteristics of north Queensland communities highlight the range of economic opportunities that were potentially available to Japanese women and provide a basis for investigating their business activities.

While women have generally been paid scant attention in most histories of Japanese migration to northern Australia, some historians have provided a useful starting point for investigating Japanese women's business activities.[14] After Sissons's 1977 pioneering research focusing on the *karayuki-san* who were trafficked from Japan, Su-Jane Hunt was the earliest historian to argue that Japanese women in Australia had autonomy and control in their lives as 'prostitutes and madams', but also acknowledged that many were forced to work against their will. Hunt pieced together court proceedings and newspaper articles to identify women who managed brothels in north-west Australia, particularly around Roebourne and Broome, suggesting these women were 'perhaps the Japanese "entrepreneurs" of northern Australia'.[15]

More recently, historians have taken the story of Japanese women further, emphasising their experiences outside of the sex industry. Noreen Jones's *Number 2 Home* (2002) described the lives of Japanese migrants—both men and women—beyond pearl diving and sex work, situating them as community members and business people in Western Australia.[16] Similarly, Yuriko Nagata's 2004 overview of the establishment and decline of the Japanese community in the Torres Strait integrated women into the broader history of Japanese migration to northern Australia, describing

13 Tianna Killoran, 'Visible participation: Japanese migrants in North Queensland, 1880–1941', *History Australia* 18, no. 3 (2021): 520–21.

14 For histories of Japanese migration in Australia that generally overlook women, see John Armstrong, 'Aspects of Japanese immigration to Queensland before 1900', *Queensland Heritage* 2, no. 9 (1973): 3–9; Neville Meaney, *Towards a New Vision: Australia and Japan Through 100 Years* (Sydney: Kangaroo Press, 1999); Diane Menghetti, *Sound of Our Summer Seas* (Sydney: Macmillan Art, 2004). Armstrong dedicates a single paragraph to Japanese women and discusses them only as sex workers, while Meaney devotes a single sentence to Japanese women, and Menghetti refers to the number of Japanese women in Australia, although briefly mentions the existence of some women who may have been sugarcane farmers' wives.

15 Su-Jane Hunt, *Spinifex and Hessian: Women's Lives in North-Western Australia, 1860–1900* (Perth: University of WA Press, 1986), 130–35.

16 Noreen Jones, *Number 2 Home: A Story of Japanese Pioneers in Australia* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2002), 216. Jones provides valuable research about the history of Japanese migrants in Western Australia before 1941, but some of her research is difficult to verify as it references her private 'database' (cited as 'Jones, Noreen, 'The Japanese in Western Australia before 1942', unpublished computer database in progress.')

their experiences as wives, mothers and workers as well as the significant role they played in the economic and social life of Thursday Island between 1890 and 1941. Nagata used oral histories from Thursday Island residents who recalled stories of former *karayuki-san* who ran bathhouses, boarding houses and offered cooking and sewing services during the 1930s.[17] Nagata's research indicates that some women shifted from sex work to other forms of domestic work sometime during the 1920s. Much further south, Pam Oliver's 2007 depiction of Japanese trading networks within Australia highlighted the range of personal, local and business connections fostered between Japanese migrants and the broader community, including through marriages, social occasions and community celebrations. Oliver shed light on Japanese women living in Sydney whose husbands worked in larger trading companies such as Mitsui and Mitsubishi Shoji Kaisha, arguing that these couples were crucial in developing business and professional relationships with the wider community.[18] These histories from the rest of Australia suggest that an investigation into the experiences of Japanese women who lived in north Queensland could similarly reveal stories of women's lives and business activities beyond the sex industry. Furthermore, a greater understanding of these women's lives adds more substance and detail to the existing historiography of north Queensland's thriving multicultural communities during the White Australia era.

The Business of Sex Work

Between 1910 and 1935, anywhere from a few thousand up to nearly 20,000 Japanese women were estimated to be living and working internationally as sex workers.[19] These women were colloquially labelled as *karayuki-san* in Japan, which roughly translates as 'going to China', referring to the way women were trafficked from Japan to China and eventually throughout the Asia-Pacific region. Families sold women and girls as young as seven into the sex industry, and while some may have chosen this work, they nonetheless arrived in faraway destinations,

17 Yuriko Nagata, 'The Japanese in Torres Strait', in *Navigating Boundaries*, 140, 146–47.

18 Pam Oliver, 'Japanese relationships in White Australia: The Sydney experience to 1941', *History Australia* 4, no. 1 (2007): 1–20; Pam Oliver, *Raids on Australia: 1942 and Japan's Plans for Australia* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2010), 153–56.

19 Sachiko Sone, 'The karayuki-san of Asia, 1868–1938: The role of prostitutes overseas in Japanese economic and social development' (Murdoch University, PhD thesis, 1990), 55.

including Australia at the far reaches of this network.[20] For a long time these women's lives remained unknown, but Yamazaki Tomoko's pioneering, albeit problematic, ethnographic and oral history *Sandakan No. 8* (1972) first shed light on the *karayuki-san*'s experiences. Tomoko's work, situated firmly within feminist attitudes of the time, depicted these women as victims and exploited individuals who were 'the embodiment of suffering'.[21] More recent historians, such as James Warren and Bill Mihalopoulos, have extended Tomoko's work with documentary sources to explore these women's lives in greater detail and highlight their agency, albeit within circumstances often beyond their control.[22] Mihalopoulos described the difficulties in researching the history of the *karayuki-san* and how their repeated framing as victims of sex trafficking has resulted in a selection bias when historians search archival records. He argued these women 'were never one-dimensional, nor was "prostitute" necessarily their main or only identity: they were also mothers, daughters, sisters, friends, lovers, wives, and often engaged in work besides the sale of sex'.[23] Similarly, Julia Laite's recent research into the complex lives of Lydia Harvey and Veronique Sarah White shows the way forward in depicting the subtleties of trafficked women's multi-layered experiences as victims, perpetrators, fugitives and, above all, individuals with autonomy and agency.[24]

---

20 Rae Frances, 'Sex trafficking, labour migration, and the state', in *Gender Violence in Australia: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Alana Piper and Ana Stevenson (Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2019), 119; James Francis Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayuki-San: Prostitution in Singapore, 1870–1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 69–70. In histories of the *karayuki-san*, Australia is largely overlooked, with only occasional references to Broome in Western Australia.

21 Yamazaki Tomoko, *Sandakan Brothel No. 8: An Episode in the History of Lower-Class Japanese Women*, trans. Karen Colligan-Taylor (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), 5–6. Tomoko's research methods to gather oral histories and testimonies from former *karayuki-san* and their families are problematic. Most notably, Tomoko deceived Osaki, the former *karayuki-san* she lived with for many weeks to conduct her research. Tomoko described Osaki as 'certainly the poorest of which I had ever seen or heard', but still deceived Osaki so that she would provide food and accommodation to Tomoko. Tomoko withheld her identity and purposes so that Osaki would share more information and also stole documents and photographs from families of former *karayuki-san*. For further criticisms, see Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayuki-San*, 8; Bill Mihalopoulos, *Sex in Japan's Globalization, 1870–1930: Prostitutes, Emigration and Nation-Building* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011), 47.

22 See, for example, Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayuki-San*; Warren, *Pirates, Prostitutes and Pullers*; Bill Mihalopoulos, 'Ousting the "prostitute": Retelling the story of the karayuki-san', *Postcolonial Studies* 4, no. 2 (2001): 169–87; Mihalopoulos, *Sex in Japan's Globalization*.

23 Mihalopoulos, *Sex in Japan's Globalization*, 12.

24 Julia Laite, *The Disappearance of Lydia Harvey: A True Story of Sex, Crime and the Meaning of Justice* (London: Profile Books, 2021).

Historians of sex work in Australia have described how brothels were businesses, with sex workers providing the essential labour.[25] Raelene Frances has argued that, for Japanese women in this industry, sex work and entrepreneurship were intertwined; *karayuki-san* were not always workers in the employ of another, but sometimes owned and managed brothels.[26] This perhaps explains the profitability of Japanese brothels and income of sex workers in Australia during the late nineteenth century. An 1896 report in the *Japan Weekly Mail* suggested that women 'living a life of shame abroad' earned more in Australia than any other location; the average monthly income for individual women in Australia was ¥400 per month, compared to ¥200 in India, ¥120 in Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand, and ¥100 in Hong Kong.[27] These earnings made for an average annual income of ¥4,800 for Japanese women in Australia, which was a fortune compared to the ¥40 average annual male wage in Japan. Even the highly paid Japanese divers sent home only about ¥100 annually from Thursday Island.[28] The high level of Australian *karayuki-san* earnings makes more plausible Sissons's suggestion that Japanese women invested in pearling luggers and contributed to Japanese migrants' monopoly in the Torres Strait pearling industry.[29] Even accounting for vast exaggerations, most Japanese sex workers earned huge sums, with sole operators and brothel owners likely earning more, leaving most with plenty to spare. While it is difficult to estimate the number of brothels where Japanese women worked throughout north Queensland in this period, this number was probably somewhere in the realm of 20 to 30 if we account for two or three businesses per town throughout the region. These earnings, along with the distribution of Japanese brothels through north Queensland, therefore account for a fair proportion of economic activity within the north.

North Queensland around the turn of the twentieth century, however lucrative, could be a dangerous place for Japanese women, particularly when their presence as sex workers was regarded as an 'accepted evil' and

25 See, for example, Raelene Frances, *Selling Sex: A Hidden History of Prostitution* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2007), 53–54; Barbara Minchinton, *The Women of Little Lon: Sex Workers in Nineteenth Century Melbourne* (Melbourne: Black Inc, 2021), 22–35.

26 Frances, *Selling Sex*, 53.

27 'Japanese women abroad', *Japan Weekly Mail*, 30 May 1896, 609.

28 Sissons, 'The Lady Rowena', 94.

29 Sissons, 'Karayuki-san', 181. There were suspicions, however these cannot be substantiated in any primary sources.

their bodies were used to protect white women.[30] Countless police and court records document the violence they endured, providing a narrow but useful insight into Japanese women's business activities. These sources need to be read with care because they are construed through the lens of legality, neatly casting individuals as either victims or criminals, with witnesses presenting specific versions of themselves.[31] However, incidental details captured within the reports can provide critical information about Japanese women's business activities. Little is known, for example, about a woman named Omatsu aside from information surrounding her murder on Thursday Island in 1894.[32] She reportedly was running a brothel on the island when her murderer, 'H. Abbe', who was a client and perhaps her lover, attacked her with a dagger.[33] Newspaper articles cast Omatsu as the object of Abbe's crime, giving more emphasis to her 'Japanese murderer' and his subsequent execution.[34] Within these sensationalised reports, however, there is mention that Omatsu and Abbe had discussed marrying and closing the brothel that she managed. Omatsu reneged on the deal, telling Abbe she could not close it because she needed to pay off her debts. Omatsu's discussions with Abbe suggest that she was the primary decision maker in the brothel's operation. Other women such as Orui, who was the victim of a murder-suicide in 1897 by her alleged partner, Yozo Sugimoto, was similarly identified as a sex worker but remained relatively unknown beyond the details of her death. Newspaper reports and an inquest suggest that Orui was living apart from her husband at a boarding house on Thursday Island. With no mention of other women living there, it is possible that Orui was an independent operator.[35]

---

30 Commissioner W. E. Parry-Okeden, as quoted in Sissons, 'Karayuki-san', 197. Parry-Okeden stated in 1899 that 'in the sugar districts there must be outlets for the sexual passions … and that it was less revolting and degrading if these were satisfied by Japanese rather than Caucasian women'.

31 Kay Daniels, 'Introduction', in *So Much Hard Work: Women and Prostitution in Australian History*, ed. Kay Daniels (Sydney: Fontana Books, 1984), 5. Daniels argues that historians' overreliance on legal records means that police mediate the connection between sex workers and the historian, even obscuring how the law has been selectively applied.

32 Please note that Australian archival records relating to Japanese migrants often have discrepancies and variations in spelling and naming conventions, including the anglicisation of Japanese names in official records. These discrepancies are further complicated where women's marital status changed or they used aliases. To minimise further confusion, this article refers to Japanese women by the most common spelling of their known given name followed by their family name, where relevant. This standardisation is a deliberate choice to retain clarity and consistency when referring to individuals in an Australian context. Nevertheless, the Japanese convention is to place the family name before the given name.

33 'Romantic tragedy', *Telegraph* (Brisbane), 18 May 1894, 2.

34 'Japanese murderer', *Telegraph* (Brisbane), 28 May 1894, 4.

35 'Telegraph intelligence: Thursday Island', *North Queensland Register* (hereafter *NQR*), 6 January 1897, 2; Orui [Japanese male], ID 2733713, SRS 36, QSA.

Some Japanese women not only ran businesses independent of their husbands, as in the case of Orui, but were also mobile. Tangling with the law in less violent circumstances, Nobu Ide was identified in 1910 as a sex worker in a Thursday Island brothel after she was charged with failing the dictation test. As part of the test, Nobu had to write out 50 dictated words from a nonsensical paragraph in a given European language; this was an overt attempt to label Nobu as an 'undesirable immigrant' and deport her from Australia. In the proceedings, her statement to the authorities revealed a transient and independent life. Arriving in Queensland in 1897 at the age of 15, she claimed to have spent time 'tailoring' on Thursday Island, in Townsville and in Geraldton (Western Australia) before later returning to the Torres Strait. At the time of her arrest, she was living with three other Japanese women 'next door to Kasuga's store', but stated 'I am doing business now on my own account'.[36] After Nobu's charges were dropped—prosecutors could not prove she had failed the dictation test within one year of her arrival in the Commonwealth—she appeared to continue living a similarly independent and mobile life. In 1921, Nobu was in Ayr, where authorities suspected she was running a brothel that employed at least two other Japanese women.[37] If their suspicions were true, Nobu exemplifies the Japanese brothel keepers Frances describes, with their discreet mode of operation and 'knowledge acquired through long personal experience at all levels of the industry'.[38] At various times Nobu was referred to as a single woman, but she was married in either (or both) 1913 and 1923 on Thursday Island to a pearl diver who left for Japan in 1927 and never returned. There are no other records of Nobu's romantic attachments, and marriage was probably not a critical factor in her business activities. Nobu continued living on Thursday Island until 1941 and, according to local memories, was a grandmotherly figure who ran a bathhouse and continued to offer domestic services such as mending and washing clothes into her old age.[39] Japanese businesswomen in the

36 Statement of Hayashi (Diver), 7 June 1910 and statement of Nobu Ide, 6 September 1910, Prosecution of Japanese girls at Thursday Island, 1910/5858, A1, NAA.

37 Certificate Exempting from Dictation Test (hereafter CEDT) – Nobu Ide of Ayr, 14 January 1920, 286/77, J2483, NAA; Sissons, 'Karayuki-san', 194.

38 Frances, *Selling Sex*, 54.

39 Nagata, 'Japanese in Torres Strait', 146; Sissons, 'Karayuki-san', 194; Shuji Kyuhara, 'Remains of Japanese settlers on the Torres Strait Islands', trans. Yoshihiko Yabuuchi (Japan, 1977), 16; Marriage registration for Nobu Ide and Otomotsu Tanaka, Queensland Births, Deaths and Marriages (hereafter QBDM): 1913/C/3101, State Library of Queensland (hereafter SLQ). Sissons claims that Nobu was single, while Kyuhara argues that she was married in 1923, although records of this cannot be located. The latter record indicates she was married in 1913.

sex industry were often mobile like Nobu. It is difficult to understand why, but it was likely part of a business model built upon discretion—to evade charges or escape notice of authorities—and seek out business opportunities as they arose in different towns or as the women's circumstances changed over time.

Japanese brothels continued to exist throughout north Queensland until at least the 1920s. Prosecution of Japanese women for sex work and the forced closure of brothels was very uncommon, with disincentivised police describing the Japanese brothels as 'orderly' and 'discreet'.[40] Police were forced to investigate, however, when the public complained. The Women's Franchise League periodically urged police to 'run in the bullies who were making slaves' of these 'poor fallen women' who 'inhabit the bird cages' of Charters Towers and Cairns.[41] This depiction of Japanese women as victims of trafficking and slavery is strikingly similar to the concurrent preoccupation with white slavery during this era.[42] Newspapers contributed to the moral panic by exaggerating numbers and the venality of Japanese brothels. In 1897, 170 Cairns residents petitioned for the removal of what the *Morning Post* counted as 37 women living in Sachs Street, complaining: 'the evil already large, appears to be growing. It cannot fail to have a morally detrimental effect, and … several streets have become impassable for respectable women'.[43] Police 'thoroughly investigated' and found that the number of women was far fewer, 15 women, rather than 37.[44] Police claimed it was near impossible to gather sufficient evidence to prosecute brothel owners because their businesses were often kept discreetly behind the pretence of a store, boarding house or washing factory.[45]

Similarly, in 1902 an outraged *Brisbane Courier* reported on the 'social evil in the north', calculating there were nearly 100 Japanese sex workers in Charters Towers: 'In Garde's [*sic*] lane there are six or seven places

40 'The old curiosity shops', *Evening Telegraph* (Charters Towers), 8 May 1903, 2; Memoranda re. movements and doings of Japanese women, A. Sergeant Griffin to Sub. Insp. of Police, Cairns, 23 November 1897 (hereafter letter from A. Sergeant Griffin, 1897), ID 86448, SRS 14182, QSA.

41 'Cairns towns council: Japanese brothels', *Morning Post* (Cairns), 16 October 1903, 5; 'The old curiosity shops', *Evening Telegraph* (Charters Towers), 8 May 1903, 2.

42 Julia Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens: Commercial Sex in London, 1885–1960* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 102.

43 'Cairns Municipal Council', *Morning Post* (Cairns), 9 September 1897, 4.

44 'Cairns morality', *Western Champion and General Advertiser for the Central-Western Districts*, 25 May 1897, 7; Sissons, 'Karayuki-san', 197.

45 Letter from A. Sergeant Griffin, 1897; Frances, *Selling Sex*, 54–56.

having 15 windows, at each of which every evening a Japanese woman is regularly seated'.[46] In defence, the local *Northern Miner* conducted their own investigation and concluded that there were only five houses occupied by around 10 women in total.[47] This is not to say that the brothels did not exist. Japanese women living in Gard's Lane in May 1903 reportedly told the *Evening Telegraph* that they rented rooms for the 'purposes of ill-fame'.[48] Women were paid £15 by brothel keepers for a three-year contract with the stipulation they earned £7 per week. It is not difficult to see how women may have continued to work after the end of their contract if these earnings, even if not always this high, were possible. The local reporter described municipal authorities' inspections of the women's houses, noting they were labyrinthine and scrupulously clean; inspectors were unable to find any breach of local by-laws, much to the reporter's disdain.[49] Misdirection with store fronts and even fake names were perhaps common tactics for Japanese women in the sex industry. Nobu Ide, the woman brought before police for failing the dictation test in 1910, sometimes went by the name of Kato Kawasaki, but photographs exist of a Kato Kawasaki of Thursday Island who did not resemble Nobu in age or likeness.[50]

Between the 1890s and 1920s, Japanese women's business activities in the sex industry were carried out by both married and unmarried women who could be mobile and independent. While around 80 per cent of Japanese women who arrived in Australia before 1900 appeared to be single—if only from the absence of a formal attachment to a man—the suspicion that all single Japanese women were sex workers was misplaced. While some women managed brothels, like Omatsu, others such as Orui and the nameless women in Charters Towers may have been sole operators. Nobu Ide undertook some combination of these business activities, and this was possibly the case for the dozens of other Japanese women who lived and worked in north Queensland during this period. Following the passage of the Immigration Restriction Act in 1901, and as the decades passed, it became difficult for new migrants to arrive and sex work would have become an increasingly difficult occupation for women as

46 'Social evil in the north', *Brisbane Courier*, 17 February 1902, 3.
47 'Social evil in the north', *Northern Miner* (Charters Towers), 17 March 1902, 1.
48 'The Gard's Lane evil', *Evening Telegraph* (Charters Towers), 4 May 1903, 2.
49 'The old curiosity shops', *Evening Telegraph* (Charters Towers), 8 May 1903, 2.
50 Prosecution of Japanese girls at Thursday Island, Statement of Sub-Collector of Customs, 7 September 1910, 1910/5858, A1, NAA; CEDT – Nobu Ide of Ayr, 14 January 1920, 286/77, J2483, NAA; CEDT – Kato Kawasaki, 18 August 1921, 322/016, J2483, NAA.

they aged, prompting a shift to other sources of income. It is during the 1920s and 1930s that Japanese laundries and silk stores around north Queensland become more visible in newspaper archives and stories of Japanese brothels begin to decline. As the rest of this article will show, throughout the course of their lives Japanese women of many different backgrounds had a range of economic roles in north Queensland. Sex work constituted only one small part of a much larger, more complex history of their business activities.

Japanese Women's 'Domestic' Businesses

Japanese women, whether they were married, widowed or single, undertook business activities revolving around the sale of domestic skills, including laundering, mending, tailoring and even cooking. While some women were engaged in business that is easily recognisable—holding a shop front and employing others, for example—others were involved in the often overlooked 'informal neighbourhood economy' where individual women would offer their services and skills locally to earn a living.[51] The continuum of these business practices is murky, but as Bianka Vidonja Balanzategui argues, women of many cultural backgrounds living in rural areas of north Queensland used their available skills to manage and run domestic businesses, such as laundering, tailoring and mending.[52] It is likely there were at least a dozen married Japanese women who were responsible for laundries' advertised services of mending worn clothes, replacement of buttons and tailoring of pants, their labour hidden behind the shop signs and front doors emblazoned with their husbands' names.[53]

A few married Japanese women, however, can be identified as undertaking managerial activities in partnership with their husbands, such as Otsume Iwanaga who took a leading role in her family's various business endeavours throughout the 1920s and 1930s in far north Queensland.

51 Raelene Frances, 'Twentieth century women's labour patterns', in *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation*, ed. Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans (Sydney: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), 251; Alana Piper, 'Understanding economic abuse as economic violence', in *Gender Violence in Australia*, 37.

52 Bianka Vidonja Balanzategui, 'Female invisibility in the male's world of plantation-era tropical North Queensland', *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal*, no. 26 (2020): 8, doi.org/10.22459/LFHJ.26.

53 See, for example, 'H. Toyola: Japanese Laundry', *Morning Post* (Cairns), 5 August 1897, 2; 'Japanese Laundry', *Mackay Mercury*, 28 May 1901, 4. These laundries offered services such as replacing buttons, repairing holes, 'ladies clothing made up' and clothes dyeing.

Otsume's occupation was consistently described as either 'domestic duties' or 'housewife', but her domestic space was also the location of the family's business, as was common for laundrywomen throughout the world.[54] Over the years, as the couple led different business endeavours—first a farm in the Atherton Tablelands in the 1910s, then from 1922 a silk store and, later, a laundry in Cairns during the 1930s—Otsume undoubtedly managed the store and the home, all the while raising their adopted daughter.[55] It was Otsume's daughter who stated to authorities in 1942 that her father 'spent most of his time at the farm and his wife [Otsume] spent most of her time at the shop'.[56] Shared business responsibilities between Japanese couples who owned laundries was common. Another example was Chiyoe Oki. She migrated to Australia in 1931, joining her husband Hidewo in Townsville where he managed a silk store. In 1933 they moved north to the sugar-growing town of Innisfail, where Hidewo's widowed mother already had a well-established cafe. Hidewo opened the Oki Silk Store in 1938 and the family owned a laundry a few blocks away. Incidental remarks in the local newspaper make it patently clear that Hidewo conducted the silk store while Chiyoe managed the laundry.[57] Although we may know slightly less about other women whose husbands owned laundries around north Queensland, we can draw similar conclusions. Oko Shiraki, for example, lived on the premises of the Lake Laundry in Cairns, along with her husband Tameji who was nominally the proprietor.[58] Sashi Mori also lived with her husband Kensaki on the premises of a laundry in Mount Isa. In a 1939 report from Mount Isa Station, police described her occupation as 'home duties' while her husband was a laundryman.[59] These are just a small handful of the dozen

54 Marie Francois, '"Se mantiene de lavar": The laundry business in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Mexico City', in *Female Entrepreneurs in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 40.

55 Iwanaga, Etsume [Otsume] – Alien Registration Certificate No 96/16, JAPANESE IWANAGA E, BP4/3, NAA; Prisoner of War/Internee Otsune Iwanaga, QJF16043, MP1103/2, NAA; Iwanaga, Tokitaro – Alien Registration Certificate No 73/16; JAPANESE IWANAGA T, BP4/3, NAA; 'Beautiful silk evening dresses', *Cairns Post* (hereafter *CP*), 9 September 1922, 3.

56 Annie Margaret Iwanga – Objection against internment, Anne Iwanaga Statutory Declaration, 19 May 1942, 255/741/416, MP508/1, NAA; Prisoner of War/Internee Otsune Iwanaga, QJF16043, MP1103/2, NAA.

57 'Child electrocuted', *CP*, 15 March 1939, 6. A prime example of incidental details, this information is from a report covering the inquiry into the death of Hidewo and Chiyoe's young daughter in 1939.

58 Prisoner of War/Internee Oko Shirak, QJF16167, MP1103/2, NAA. Oko's personal address was 31 Spence Street in Cairns, which matches advertisements for the Lake Laundry.

59 General — Aliens, Cloncurry District Report, 7 June 1939, Q30582 PART 2, BP242/1, NAA.

or more married Japanese women who played important roles in the operation of Japanese laundry businesses throughout north Queensland without formal recognition as business partners.

Widowed Japanese women in north Queensland also had businesses. As Bishop argues for widows in colonial Australia more generally, running a business was a respectable and expected course of action that helped provide financial security for a family, with flexibility for those who were unskilled or tied to the home.[60] The apparent ease with which some widows assumed control of family businesses that had ostensibly been their husbands' enterprises also suggests those widows were already familiar with them. Shigi Furukawa, for example, helped to run a laundry in Mackay with her husband from 1926. As her husband's health declined over the years, it is likely she took over the management until she became the named proprietor following his death in early 1941.[61] Kuma Oki, the mother-in-law of Chiyoe Oki, had a successful cafe in Innisfail. She had not inherited a family business. Instead, in 1924, at the age of 47, she opened her small cafe some time after her husband's death.[62] Kuma was the sole owner of this establishment on Edith Street and was successful. She was in business for at least 15 years. She would have served warm meals—probably noodle-based—to locals and sugar labourers from nearby Mourilyan, taking advantage of their desire for a nice meal cooked by a woman in an otherwise male-dominated environment.[63] The arrival of her son and daughter-in-law in 1933 created a small family network with three businesses between them. Kuma probably helped out with her growing brood of young grandchildren—the couple had six children by 1941—and encouraged her son and daughter-in-law in their business ventures. Perhaps this small network was mutually beneficial, with each person's business connections growing their local customer base.[64]

---

60 Catherine Bishop, 'On their own in a "man's world": Widows in business in colonial Australia and New Zealand', in *Female Entrepreneurs in the Long Nineteenth Century,* 177.

61 'Thanks', *Daily Mercury* (Mackay), 2 September 1936, 6; Prisoner of War/Internee Shigi Fulukawa, QJF16014, MP1103/2, NAA; Application for leave to submit objections against detention order for Shigi Fulukawa, FULUKAWA/S, MP529/8, NAA.

62 Application for leave to submit objections against detention order for Mrs Kuma Oki, OKI/K, MP529/8, NAA.

63 Prisoner of War/Internee, Kuba Oki, QJF16134, MP1103/2, NAA. Among her possessions was a 'machine for making spaghetti'. Bishop, 'On their own', 185; 'Innisfail health', *CP*, 31 July 1925, 10. The *CP* article indicates the presence of a Japanese cafe at the rear of an unnamed cafe on Edith Street in 1925, which is likely to have been Kuma's.

64 Hidewo Oki and wife and family – Detention orders, Department of the Army Minute Paper, 27 January 1942, 255/742/520, MP508/1, NAA.

A small handful of women, including widows and unmarried women, may also have undertaken self-directed and independent businesses in their old age, but there are few details available. Nagata recorded oral histories that identify five former *karayuki-san* who were living on Thursday Island in 1941 and making a living by offering their domestic services in the form of laundering and mending clothes and running a bath house and boarding house.[65] Little else is known about their activities, but evidently each were independently supporting themselves as they had no known husbands or partners. Masu Kusamo, at around the age of 51, was one of these women who supported herself after her husband left for Japan in 1922 and never returned. She moved around for a few years after his departure, before eventually settling on Thursday Island.[66] While further details about Masu's business activities are unclear, along with other 'single' women like her, these small details again highlight the multifaceted work undertaken by Japanese women throughout north Queensland, regardless of their marital status or age. This range of domestic work furthers our understanding of how typically 'feminine' skills were used to Japanese businesswomen's advantage. The prevalence of Japanese women as business partners throughout the first three decades of the twentieth century contrasts with their typically piecemeal roles as sole operators in the 1930s and 1940s. This variation indicates that Japanese women adapted their business activities to changing circumstances in their lives and therefore need to be understood in the context of their individual life circumstances.

Japanese Women and Silk Stores

Prominent silk stores around north Queensland were often owned and managed by a Japanese couple or family, although a few women appear to have been independent operators. These silk stores were located in nearly every north Queensland town—Atherton, Innisfail, Townsville, Cairns, Chillagoe and more—offering fabrics and haberdashery, readymade clothing, specialty household items and even bug repellent for tropical

65 Nagata, 'Japanese in Torres Strait', 146.

66 CEDT – Jirokichi Okamoto, 16 February 1922, 335/033, J2883, NAA; CEDT – Mrs Masu Okamoto, 9 July 1928, 440/99, J2483, NAA; Prisoner of War/Internee, Masu Kusano, QJF16234, MP1103/2, NAA.

insects.[67] With many of these items of a 'feminine' kind, the presence of a woman behind the counter to offer advice on recent stocks of crepe-de-chines, laces and georgettes would have been a sound business decision. Japanese women had more than a minor role in these businesses; they were responsible for the keeping of the store and, in some cases, managed the storefront while their husband handled the importation of stock and trade relationships. The women in these shopfronts capitalised on local gender roles that entangled femininity and domesticity with clothing and household items, giving them a specific advantage to participate in north Queensland's economic life.

Not all married women, however, ran silk stores in partnership with their husbands. Some women, like Toki Mayeshiba, were independently responsible for the management of their businesses.[68] Toki, often referred by her pre-marital name—Toki Shiomasu—lived on Thursday Island and managed a Japanese store there. Her husband stated on a 1902 application to visit Japan for 12 months that 'my wife is on Thursday Island and will superintend my business during my absence'.[69] His expression of sole proprietorship was overstated. Toki seems to have continued to manage the store herself, with Naokichi travelling back to Japan again in 1905, 1907 and 1911, each time for at least six months until he did not return from Japan in 1912.[70] Toki independently ran the store until at least 1922.[71] Kame Tashima in Townsville was another woman who can be seen as a businesswoman in her own right. She was married to Yoshimatsu Tashima, proprietor of Tashima's Silk Store, which was one of the largest importers and retailers of Japanese goods in north Queensland.[72] Little is known

67 See, for example: 'T. Iwanaga', *CP*, 23 October 1923, 3; 'K. Sakaguchi', *CP*, 17 August 1921, 5; 'K. Takaoka', *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton), 11 May 1912, 4; 'Specials this week at Fujiya's', *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 13 November 1929, 2.

68 Annie Margaret Iwanga – Objection against internment, Anne Iwanaga Statutory Declaration, 19 May 1942 (hereafter Anne Iwanaga statement), 255/741/416, MP508/1, NAA; 'Child electrocuted', *CP*, 15 March 1939, 6.

69 Application for Certificate of Domicile for Naokichi Mayeshiba, 14 January 1903, 118, J3115, NAA.

70 Certificate of Domicile for Naokichi Mayeshiba of Thursday Island, 16 March 1905, 1905/32, J2482, NAA; CEDT – Naokichi Mayeshiba, 5 March 1907, 1907/101, J3136, NAA; CEDT – Naokichi Mayeshiba, 18 May 1910, 42/49, J2483, NAA.

71 CEDT – Naskichi Mayeshiba of Thursday Island, 4 March 1912, 92/43, J2483, NAA; CEDT – Toki Mayeshiba of Thursday Island, 16 December 1919, 286/19, J2483, NAA. Naokichi left for Japan in March 1912 and there was no listed date of return. Multiple CEDTs, however, show that Toki travelled in and out of Australia until at least November 1922.

72 CEDT – Kame Tashima, Yoshimatsu Tashima, Memorandum from the Sub-Collector of Customs, 25 January 1913 (hereafter CEDT Kame and Yoshimatsu), 171/1913, J2773, NAA; Oliver, *Raids on Australia*, 81.

about Kame's life, but her role as a businesswoman in partnership with her husband was clearly recognised by others. In 1913, the sub-collector of customs reported that 'these two people are well known in this town [Townsville], both in business and other circles', later reiterating that *both* Mr and Mrs Tashima were well-known businesspeople around town.[73] Such overt acknowledgement went counter to the 'male breadwinner – female dependant' rhetoric of the time, suggesting that Kame's role in the business was substantial. Some other Japanese women were involved in stores independent of any husband. In her application for domicile in 1903, Mrs Omiyo Yamashita from Thursday Island provided character references stating that she had been known as a storekeeper on Thursday Island for nearly two years, with her husband still living in Nagasaki during that time.[74] Little else is known about her business.

Japanese women involved in silk stores were from different classes, but often received community recognition of status, with many able to even improve their social standing because of their roles as merchants. As Oliver explained in her discussion of Japanese businesses in Sydney, most Japanese merchant families lived under a two-fold social stratification: the Australian community and the Japanese community. Within the Australian community, Japanese migrants' 'position as prosperous small business families enabled them to enter the "middle class" of Australian society where they were often well-known and respected'.[75] Within the Japanese community, merchant families involved in the import–export trade were given higher status compared to the much smaller business owners.[76] Otsume Iwanaga of Iwanaga & Co. in Cairns, and Kame Tashima of Tashima's Silk Store in Townsville, for example, both appear to be women of different, albeit generally respected, status. While Otsume may have been of a lower class on arrival to Australia—having lived in the Atherton Tablelands and married to a farmer—the Iwanaga family, Otsume included, were socially elevated when they took up their silk store in Cairns.[77] Mentioned occasionally in the social and community pages of local newspapers, Otsume was often involved in local charity benefits and the occasion of their daughter's eighteenth birthday party was a celebrated

73 CEDT Kame and Yoshimatsu.
74 Application for Certificate of Domicile for Omiya Yasashita, a storekeeper from Thursday Island, 8537/351/1903, BP342/1, NAA.
75 Oliver, 'Japanese relationships', 9.
76 Oliver, 'Japanese relationships', 9.
77 Anne Iwanaga statement.

event.[78] Despite Otsume's high social regard in Cairns, Kame Tashima's connection to the much larger importing business of Tashima's provided her an even more esteemed position within Townsville. Kame and her husband once were excused from providing photographs and handprints in their application for Certificates of Exemption after protesting through their solicitors that: 'in Japan hand prints and photographs are only taken from those who have been convicted of criminal offences, and the applicants therefore being of good birth find it especially galling to have to submit the same'.[79] Kame and her husband were also among the guests at the Japanese consul, Goro Narita's, last few events at Kardinia in Townsville in 1907, while her husband was elected to the local Chamber of Commerce in 1912.[80] Even comparing photographs of Otsume and Kame reveal Kame's carefully coiffed hair and tailored high-neck blouse, which contrast with Otsume's more casually pinned hair and her loose, low-collared blouse.[81] Evidently, even Japanese women involved in the same 'type' of business had different experiences within the Australian community based on their perceived class and social standing.

Conclusion

These are but some small glimpses of the various forms of work and business undertaken by Japanese women in north Queensland between 1887 and 1941. They were sometimes mobile or independent, able to support themselves as individuals, whereas in other cases they ran businesses with their husbands. Their business activities in north Queensland were far more complex than the too-often told story of impoverished and vulnerable *karayuki-san* who were trafficked to north Queensland during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In any circumstance—whether sex workers; married, unmarried, or widowed; or located in regional centres or remote locations of north Queensland—Japanese women made important contributions to the region's economic and social life.

78 'Edmonton notes', *CP*, 22 October 1936, 9; 'Edmonton news', *CP*, 10 October 1936, 9.

79 CEDT Kame and Yoshimatsu, Letter from Hobbs, Wilson & Ryan, Solicitors, Notaries Public, etc., to the Sub-Collector of Customs, 21 January 1913.

80 'Emperor of Japan's birthday', *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 5 November 1907, 3; 'Town and country', *CP*, 27 February 1912, 6.

81 CEDT – Otosune Iwanaga and infant, 16 February 1921, 299/079, J2483 NAA; CEDT – Kame Tashima of Townsville, 18 January 1903, 124/88, J2483, NAA; CEDT – Kame Tashima of Townsville, 18 April 1918, 256/63, J2483, NAA. Taken a decade apart, the first two photos provide the starkest contrast. In the later picture, however, Kame sports a similarly neat hairstyle and higher collar.

The mosaic of documentary sources such as newspaper articles and advertisements, immigration and internment records, and police reports helps build a picture of Japanese women's diverse business activities. Out of around 77 identified Japanese women who lived in the region during this time, at least one-third of them undertook business activities of some kind. These business activities may have been in the sex industry—as managers and owners, or as independent operators—but others were also involved in the sale of domestic services and goods. The undertaking of domestic business activities was common for Japanese women, whether these services included laundering, mending, cooking or cleaning. While some of these women were married to men who were laundry proprietors, other women were proprietors in their own right. Even within silk stores, Japanese women with various degrees of status benefited both socially and economically by taking advantage of gender norms to assume key roles in businesses. While it may have been their husband's name on the sign above the door, Japanese wives were often also engaged in the enterprise and were recognised alongside their husbands as respected businesspeople in the community. This range of business activities shows how Japanese women could utilise 'feminine' domestic skills to their advantage in the economic landscape of north Queensland and to build a life that was, for some, mobile and independent.

Considering their experiences as businesswomen is just one way of understanding Japanese women in north Queensland. These experiences do not simply fit conventional narratives of the *karayuki-san* and impoverished women who 'inhabit the bird cages' of northern Australia. When reading the archives, we need to ask more probing questions. What is the story behind the photograph of elusive Japanese women wearing kimonos at Hambledon Plantation outside Cairns, and who was the Japanese woman who posed for photographer Harriett Brimms in her studio in Mareeba, for example?[82] Not all Japanese women were in business, and our understanding of those who were is still fragmentary. However, taking a broader view of these women's experiences allows us to start building a more complex story of their lives.

82 Two Japanese women on the driveway to the overseers house, Hambledon Sugar Plantation 1891, image 50236475496, SLQ; Studio portrait of a Japanese woman wearing a kimono in Mareeba, Queensland, date unknown, image 31054-0001-0466, SLQ.

Relational Autonomy: Addressing the Vulnerabilities of Women in a Global Pandemic

Petra Brown and Tamara Kayali Browne
Deakin University

Abstract

Covid-19 has exacerbated women's vulnerabilities because Western neoliberal societies expect, support and celebrate individuals who embody and exercise an individualistic view of autonomy. In reality, however, many people, especially women, operate on a relational view of autonomy that mostly goes unrecognised and unsupported. Relational autonomy recognises that our interpersonal relationships are not only important but also inform our decision-making. In contrast, the individualistic view of autonomy does not take into account one's relationality and shifts responsibility to the individual alone. It blinds proponents of this view of autonomy to institutions, norms and values that position some citizens in situations in which it is all but impossible to exercise autonomy on the individualistic ideal, and encourages those institutions to maintain the same systems. Covid-19 has put more pressure on people in female-dominated roles such as carers, nurses and teachers, and magnified the risks for those who endure domestic violence, and little support has been made available to protect or compensate them. The pandemic has thus laid bare the consequences of valuing the atomistic ideal of the autonomous subject over a relational one.

Covid-19 has impacted certain groups of people more than others, having the most impact on those already vulnerable even before the pandemic. Researchers are now considering the long-term impact of the global pandemic on groups that were already experiencing discrimination due to gender, race, socio-economic status and other intersectional measures that lead to entrenched social exclusion. This includes feminist analysis of public policy responses to paid and unpaid care and domestic work during the global pandemic, using a vulnerability approach to analyse 'gendered

risk factors', promoting 'the study of social inequalities in times of crisis' as essential to good policy design, and highlighting the importance of placing 'care' at the heart of the economy and society as a way to both 'fix the care crisis' and 'leave a positive legacy for future generations'.[1] In the reconfigured post-Covid world, attention is now turning to interventions to address deep structural inequalities in more holistic ways. This paper contributes to this research by considering the political foundation that has led to the structural inequalities that now occupy researchers and policymakers. Our focus is on the impact of Covid-19 on women in the home: in particular, on the increased burden of caretaking duties and the increased risk of domestic violence.

In this paper we argue that the individualistic/atomistic model of autonomy, which appears to be the prevailing model in Western neoliberal societies, is at least partly to blame for the range of inequalities that have deepened as a result of the global pandemic. The individualistic/atomistic model of autonomy conceives the self as 'ideally self-sufficient, as operating in a vacuum unaffected by social relationships, or as an abstract reasoner stripped of distorting influences such as emotions'.[2] It does not take into account the gendered nature of formal and informal work and blinds its proponents from seeing the relationships and social contexts that can make citizens vulnerable. Relational autonomy is a model of autonomy that takes these factors into account. Relational autonomy 'is compatible with the agent standing in and valuing significant family and other social relationships'. It emphasises 'that persons are socially and historically embedded, not metaphysically isolated, and shaped by factors such as race and class'.[3] We argue that the global pandemic has highlighted the weakness of the individualistic model of autonomy and

1 Elena Camilletti and Zahrah Nesbitt-Ahmed, 'Covid-19 and a "crisis of care": A feminist analysis of public policy responses to paid and unpaid care and domestic work', *International Labour Review* 161, no. 2 (2022): 195–218; Pavithra Siriwardhane and Tehmina Khan, 'The gendered nature of the risk factors of the Covid-19 pandemic and gender equality: A literature review from a vulnerability perspective', *Sustainability* 13, no. 23 (2021): 1–18; Daniel Béland, Alex Jingwei He and M. Ramesh, 'Covid-19, crisis responses, and public policies: From the persistence of inequalities to the importance of policy design', *Policy and Society* 41, no. 2 (2022): 187–98; Ruth Pearson and Eva Neitzert, 'Learning from Covid-19: How to make care central to economic policy around the world', *New York University Center on International Cooperation*.

2 Natalie Stoljar, 'Feminist perspectives on autonomy', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/feminism-autonomy/.

3 Stoljar, 'Feminist perspectives on autonomy'.

that this strengthens the case for relational autonomy as an alternative model. Using a relational model of autonomy may help to alleviate, rather than exacerbate, gender inequalities.

Inequality and the Global Pandemic

Disasters such as the global pandemic are 'social, arising from a combination of hazard and vulnerability', writes Ilan Kelmin. The vulnerability in this case is linked to health systems and, more broadly, to the way 'humanity disturbs ecosystems' to the extent that microbes can jump species freely, as has happened in a number of disease outbreaks over recent years.[4] Kelmin's observations are instructive as we consider the impact of the global pandemic not only in terms of social, but also political reconfigurations. Researchers with expertise in geopolitics consider the way the 2020 global pandemic has challenged existing territorial, political and governmental orders. There is now consistent evidence that the impacts of the pandemic have deepened existing social inequalities.[5] Far from assertions that we are 'all in it together', pandemics reveal the 'uneven capacity to act and react for some', while for others, they present opportunities 'for profiteering'.[6]

Geopolitical researchers note that a crisis often highlights existing socio-economic, gender, class and ethnicity-related inequalities, as they impact some groups more than others. Women, for example, were impacted in a range of ways—from health care outcomes, to work experiences, to increased risk to domestic violence. This was particularly true of women in low socio-economic, ethnically or racially marginalised communities.[7] Women were caught up in the impact of the pandemic in often negative ways. Globally, women are more likely to be employed in the informal economy, and are therefore more susceptible to falling into

4 Ilan Kelman, 'Covid-19: What is the disaster?' *Social Anthropology* 28, no. 2 (2020): 296–97.

5 United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 'Policy brief: The impact of Covid-19 on women', *UN Women*, unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women.

6 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) University of Pittsburgh, 'Global report on gender equality in public administration', *UNDP*, undp.org/publications/global-report-gender-equality-public-administration.

7 J. Michael Ryan and Serena Nanda, *Covid-19: Social Inequalities and Human Possibilities* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 60.

extreme poverty as a result of economic disruption.[8] Women who have been subjected to sexual and physical violence found themselves living in isolation with abusive intimate partners.[9] Women carried the burden of caring and schooling children forced to study from home, even whilst trying to maintain incomes.

Women Have Less Power in Decision-Making

Why have women borne the burden of the most recent global pandemic? Looking at previous pandemics, such as the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa and the Zika outbreak of 2015–16, women have less 'power in decision making'.[10] For this reason, their needs go unseen, unheard and unmet, even though they are often directly involved in community responses. This lack of representation is not limited to poorer countries. When set up in March 2020, the United States' 27 member White House Coronavirus Task Force included just two women. Indeed, women's representation was lacking across a wide range of Covid-19 task forces, examined in 163 countries and territories. It was found that 18 per cent of task forces had women leaders, only 6 per cent of Covid-19 task forces showed gender parity, and 11 per cent had no women at all.[11] As Wenham, Smith and Morgan note, this lack of representation was concerning. They suggested that women be included at higher levels of decision-making around Covid-19 global responses:

> Given their front-line interaction with communities, it is concerning that women have not been fully incorporated into global health security surveillance, detection, and prevention mechanisms. Women's socially prescribed care roles typically place them in a prime position to identify trends at the local level that might signal the start of an outbreak and thus improve global

8 United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 'From insights to action: gender equality in the wake of Covid-19', *UN Women*, unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/09/gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-covid-19.

9 Anthony Faiola and Ana Vanessa Herrero, 'For women and children around the world, a double plague: Coronavirus and domestic violence', *Washington Post*, 6 September 2020, washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/coronavirus-domestic-violence/2020/09/06/78c134de-ec7f-11ea-b4bc-3a2098fc73d4_story.html.

10 Clare Wenham, Julia Smith and Rosemary Morgan, 'Covid-19: The gendered impacts of the outbreak', *The Lancet* 395, no. 10227 (2020): 846–48.

11 UNDP University of Pittsburgh, 'Gender equality in public administration'.

> health security. Although women should not be further burdened, particularly considering much of their labour during health crises goes underpaid or unpaid, incorporating women's voices and knowledge could be empowering and improve outbreak preparedness and response.[12]

Wenham et al. advocated for the inclusion of women's voices in decision-making processes based on improved health security outcomes, such as identifying local trends. Yet, the growing inequalities that emerged due to Covid-19 show that incorporating women's voices and knowledge in seeking to improve outbreak preparedness and response is not a straightforward matter. It is questionable whether short-term interventions are the best way to address the adverse impact of the pandemic on women. Indeed, as the long-term impact of the pandemic is now unfolding, researchers suggest a range of intersectional factors must be taken into account to ensure any 'mitigation measures' do not ignore the root causes of inequalities and, instead, exacerbate 'pre-existing' inequalities, including gender in relation to care.[13] Long-term recovery from the global pandemic requires that we as a society raise larger questions about political and social equity for a range of marginalised groups, including women. This requires questioning the foundation of the political and social contract of Western neoliberal societies.

Problems with the Individualistic Model of Autonomy

The model of political autonomy that informs Western neoliberal society and its political structures is based on the belief that the individual is a rational political agent who acts autonomously on their own behalf. Thomas Hobbes described the agents of the social contract as 'mushrooms', who 'sprung out of the earth' suddenly coming 'to full maturity, without all kind of engagement without each other'.[14] This image of 'men as mushrooms', suggested Seyla Benhabib over three decades ago, is also the 'ultimate picture of autonomy'. This is a problem because women did not engage in the modern political contracting that led to this model. Instead, they were

12 Wenham, Smith and Morgan, 'The gendered impacts of the outbreak', 847.
13 Camilletti and Nesbitt-Ahmed, 'Covid-19 and a "crisis of care"', 196.
14 Thomas Hobbes, cited in Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 161.

invisible in the domestic realm where, among other things, they nurtured the men who ventured into the public world, some of them privileged to conduct the business of governing themselves (and everyone else). In Benhabib's view, the dichotomy between autonomy, independence and the male governmental sphere, on the one hand, and nurturance, bonding and the female domestic sphere, on the other, is a legacy of the modern social contract that still pervades contemporary moral and political theory.[15] This can be seen in the level of women's participation in political decision-making around the world. While it has increased dramatically over the last hundred years, women continue to be under-represented with an average of 20 per cent participation of women in parliament globally. This representation is not equally distributed either. Sixty per cent of countries have less than 20 per cent women in their national legislatures.[16] Thus, the gender representation gap remains substantial. While there are complex reasons for this, at least part of this is due to the patriarchal nature of the social contract that emerged in the seventeenth century and that has shaped contemporary neoliberal democracies.[17]

Benhabib had good cause to revisit the 'men as mushrooms' metaphor in 2020. This view of autonomy has re-emerged in the political imaginary in the current global pandemic, as some nation-states retreated from international cooperation to operate as 'autarkies', or as independent and self-sufficient states. This has been noted by geopolitical researchers who refer to the 'authoritarian opportunism and geopolitical skullduggery' evidenced by some states. At the same time, there has also been evidence of support and solidarity towards vulnerable communities, including migrants and asylum seekers that tends to accompany a more open attitude to international cooperation. This turn to self-sufficiency in the political imaginary requires feminist perspectives, suggests Benhabib.[18] She is not alone in identifying issues for women in the traditional view of autonomy. For some time now, feminist philosophers have critiqued what they call an overly individualistic account of agency that ignores the importance of interpersonal relationships. Feminist philosophers suggest that the account of autonomy and conceptions of agency offered through philosophy are

15 Benhabib, *Situating the Self*, 161–62.

16 Pamela Marie Paxton, Melanie M. Hughes and Tiffany Barnes, *Women, Politics, and Power: A Global Perspective* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2007), 2–3.

17 Gita Sen and Marina Durano, *The Remaking of Social Contracts: Feminists in a Fierce New World* (London: Zed Books, 2014), 5.

18 Seyla Benhabib, 'Democracy, science and the state: Reflections on the disaster(s) of our times', *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 47, no. 4 (2021): 482.

framed in terms of methodological individualism. This presupposes that the individual, their intentions, goals, beliefs and desires are the starting point of philosophy, and that claims about the social world are ultimately reducible to facts about individuals.[19] It is not only Hobbes who privileged the male model of autonomy as being independent and self-sufficient. The Kantian rational agent similarly acts autonomously, untainted by the influence of desires or interests of a particular situation, ultimately finding its political expression in the Rawlsian idea that principles of justice are derived from behind a 'veil of ignorance' about individual contexts.[20]

Feminists reject what they refer to as an 'atomistic' nature of the self and the value of autonomy that emerges from this account. They see this account as itself embedded in social relations in which self-sufficiency, held up as a neutral model, is actually the ideal of the self-sufficient man. Marilyn Friedman describes this notion of autonomy as associated with 'male biographies' and 'male-identified traits' and that such a view of autonomy is 'inhospitable to women' in the way it 'represents a masculine-style preoccupation with self-sufficiency and self-realization at the expense of human connection'.[21] Catriona Mackenzie suggests that the conception of the ideal citizen as a 'self-interested, independent, rational contractor', does not take into account the many vulnerable relationships that exist in society.[22] Thus, feminist philosophers have critiqued what they consider to be overly individualistic accounts of agency that ignore the importance of interpersonal relationships and, instead, have proposed an alternative account of autonomy.

Strengthening the Case for a Relational Account of Autonomy

As an alternative to this traditional account of autonomy, feminist philosophers have introduced the concept of 'relational autonomy', where inter-relationality with others is seen as fundamental to a healthy

19 Catriona Mackenzie, 'Feminist innovation in philosophy: Relational autonomy and social justice', *Women's Studies International Forum* 72 (2019): 144–51.

20 Stoljar, 'Feminist perspectives on autonomy'.

21 Marilyn Friedman, 'Autonomy, social disruption and women', in *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*, ed. Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 35–37.

22 Mackenzie, 'Relational autonomy and social justice', 147.

sense of autonomy or independence. Several views can be identified that challenge prevailing views of autonomy and resulting social and political arrangements. These views seek, in various ways, to reconfigure interpersonal, social and political arrangements in light of relational autonomy.

Marilyn Friedman prioritises interpersonal relations and social arrangements in her account of autonomy. Traditional autonomy as it is currently understood has a tendency to disrupt existing interpersonal relationships, notes Friedman.[23] Women therefore often express what Friedman calls 'autonomophobia', a fear of autonomy as they perceive they will suffer the impact of the end of a relationship to their own well being. This fear of autonomy does not mean fear of one's *own* autonomy, but fear of others exercising their autonomy and finding oneself 'helpless' as a result.[24] Yet, the potential for disruption does not mean women should reject exercising their autonomy. Drawing on the positive benefits of autonomy, Friedman suggests that women can benefit from reflecting critically on their interpersonal relationships, and the social norms and values that underlie them: 'Autonomy is … crucial for women in patriarchal conditions in part because of its potential to disrupt social bonds'.[25] Its disruptive aspects can be positive for women in that they come to see that they are not simply determined by their social positioning. Friedman suggests that women seek to overcome their 'autonomophobia' and to exercise at least enough autonomy to secure their own material needs and, thereby, reduce vulnerability to men who exercise their autonomy and can harm their existing relationships.

Considering the political dimensions of relationality, Catriona Mackenzie is particularly interested in relational autonomy and social justice. Mackenzie notes that 'the rhetoric of maximal choice, personal responsibility, and the minimal state often functions to mask social injustice, structural inequality, and corrosive disadvantage' through shifting responsibility away from the collective towards the individual.[26] It is not enough to speak of autonomy as an ideal when 'an important measure of a just society is the extent to which its political, social and legal institutions support the development of its citizens' capacities for

23 Friedman, 'Autonomy, social disruption and women', 36.
24 Friedman, 'Autonomy, social disruption and women', 45.
25 Friedman, 'Autonomy, social disruption and women', 45–47.
26 Mackenzie, 'Relational autonomy and social justice', 147.

autonomy', suggests Mackenzie.[27] When the responsibility for autonomy is located within the individual, society becomes blind to the role that institutions, norms and values hold in enabling the capacity for individual autonomy. In her 'multidimensional analysis' Mackenzie proposes that the concept of autonomy consists of three conceptually distinct, but causally interdependent, dimensions: self-determination, which understands autonomy in terms of freedom from undue interference; self-governance, which understands autonomy in terms of the internalised conditions that enable a capacity to express competency and authenticity; and self-authorisation, which signals the way autonomy as both status and capacity are linked to social relations of recognition.[28] While the first is generally the view of libertarian autonomy, the other two dimensions provide a richer account of autonomy that includes capacity and social recognition. All three dimensions, self-determination, self-governance and self-authorisation, retain the traditional meaning of autonomy as individual decision-making and action, but acknowledge the broader social and political context that directly impacts on the opportunity to exercise autonomy.

Friedman and Mackenzie offer alternative accounts of autonomy that can be characterised as forms of 'relational autonomy'. Such accounts value commitments and responsibilities (including care of the vulnerable), and extend beyond individual decision-making to include social and political consciousness and discourse. One important point of debate is the question of what counts as exercising one's autonomy, a question that is particularly pressing in situations where gender oppression is evident. Existing social mechanisms including inequalities of power, authority or social and economic status significantly undermine the capacity to develop self-governance and self-authorisation.[29] Indeed, women may even adopt 'adaptive preferences' that continue to support the maintenance of harmful structures, thereby undermining their own capacity for self-governance and self-authorisation.[30] Thus feminist philosophers are divided over what constitutes the practice, or failure to practice, of autonomous decision-making. This raises the larger question of 'agency dilemma', which Mackenzie describes as 'the challenge of recognising and analyzing the vulnerabilities of persons subject to social oppression

27 Mackenzie, 'Relational autonomy and social justice', 146.
28 Mackenzie, 'Relational autonomy and social justice', 147–48.
29 Mackenzie, 'Relational autonomy and social justice', 146–47.
30 Mackenzie, 'Relational autonomy and social justice', 147–49.

or deprivation, while also acknowledging and respecting their agency'.[31] The challenge for any intervention program is to offer scaffolding that respects agency, whilst also seeking to transform harmfully adaptive preferences, notes Mackenzie.

One way to respond to the problem of 'agency dilemma' is to reconfigure the notion of autonomy from being an 'ideal' or 'absolute' condition that few can attain in reality, to autonomy expressed in terms of 'degree, or more or less', or 'scalar': 'a person can be self-determining, self-governing and self-authorizing to differing degrees, both at a time and over the course of her life'.[32] Thus, autonomy is possible when *some* of our goals and commitments are self-chosen, even if others continue to be the result of social and relational influences. Considering autonomy in terms of degrees is appropriate, as relational autonomy seeks to balance a sense of individualistic agency with existing social embeddedness, recognising that we do not emerge into the world 'without engagement from each other', as per Hobbes. Relational autonomy acknowledges that we already exist in 'unchosen' relationships that impact on our self-identity and opportunities. If these existing social contexts are ignored, we count as agents only those individuals (including women) who somehow pull themselves 'free' from their socially embedded situations. This is precisely the critique levelled at individualistic accounts of autonomy.

Relational Autonomy in Practice

If we consider relational autonomy as a matter of degree, or more or less, then we can also see a broader application of this theory in a wide range of practical contexts. Indeed, relational autonomy as a theoretical concept has gained more traction in inter-disciplinary contexts than in philosophy proper, where it is often relegated to fringe or special interest discussion.[33] In particular, relational autonomy has emerged powerfully within the context of applied disciplines, including bioethics, health studies, nursing, law, psychology, education and aged care. This provides a welcome opportunity to move beyond a 'theoretical lens' that often arrives at impasses to an 'appreciation for the process of how individuals arrive at the ability to autonomously authorize their consent', suggests Burrow, writing

31 Mackenzie, 'Relational autonomy and social justice', 147.
32 Friedman, 'Autonomy, social disruption and women', 41; Mackenzie, 'Relational autonomy and social justice', 148.
33 Mackenzie, 'Relational autonomy and social justice', 144–45.

in the context of healthcare for vulnerable groups, including the elderly.[34] Burrow notes that the traditional account of autonomy as 'a capacity of wholly self-governing individuals largely unaffected by their relations or sociopolitical environments' is particularly difficult to enact in practice for, in reality, healthcare decisions are rarely made in such conditions. We can see this, for example, in the factors that motivate people to get vaccinated against Covid-19. A survey study of Australian adults found that one of the top three reasons individuals stated for wanting to get the Covid-19 vaccine was to protect themselves *and others*.[35]

The shift to 'relational autonomy' considers the extent to which 'a person's decision-making is facilitated or inhibited by a multitude of factors', including the support of others involved. This is particularly important in healthcare, where 'structures of power and privilege' impact on decision-making capacity. Supporting autonomous decision-making in these applied contexts requires 'recognizing personal, relational, and structural factors affecting conditions requisite to autonomy competencies or capacities'. That is, the work of feminist philosophers can helpfully illuminate practical contexts in which autonomous decision-making can be enabled.[36]

This idea is particularly relevant to decision-making in the current climate of the global pandemic. Crises and times of unrest have been linked to increased interpersonal violence, and the global pandemic provided 'an enabling environment that may exacerbate or spark' forms of violence against women and children.[37] A research report released in 2020 found that governments were responding to increased intimate partner violence in a number of ways, including allocating additional funding to support services and shelters, as well as modifying family law and justice systems. These interventions are designed to reduce immediate risk to women and children.[38] They also furnish the conditions that enable women subjected to

34 Sylvia Burrow, 'Relational autonomy and support for autonomy: A commentary on "Relational Autonomy as a Theoretical Lens for Qualitative Health Research" by Jennifer A. H. Bell', *IJFAB: International Journal of Feminist Approaches to Bioethics* 13, no. 2 (2020): 99–102.

35 Rachael H. Dodd et al., 'Perceived public health threat a key factor for willingness to get the Covid-19 vaccine in Australia', *Vaccine* 40, no. 17 (2022): 2484–90.

36 Burrow, 'Relational autonomy and support for autonomy', 100.

37 Amber Peterman et al., 'Working paper: Pandemics and violence against women and children', *Center for Global Development*, cgdev.org/publication/pandemics-and-violence-against-women-and-children.

38 Alessandra Guedes, Amber Peterman and Dina Deligiorgis, 'Five ways governments are responding to violence against women and children during Covid-19', *UNICEF*, blogs.unicef.org/evidence-for-action/five-ways-governments-are-responding-to-violence-against-women-and-children-during-covid-19/.

intimate partner violence to enact self-determination, which understands autonomy in terms of freedom from undue interference, and self-governance, which understands autonomy to require a capacity to express competency and authenticity, as per MacKenzie's insights. Yet, researchers further noted that a truly effective response beyond the immediate crisis required that 'women and children are included in preparedness processes and decision-making, and are recognized as persons with skilled roles to play in response'.[39] Incorporating women's voices in long-term planning enables what Mackenzie refers to as self-authorisation, which signals the way autonomy as both status and capacity is linked to social relations of recognition. Recognising women and children as 'skilful' in designing and implementing long-term policy responses in response to domestic violence significantly enriches the traditional meaning of autonomy as individual decision-making and action, and also acknowledges the broader social and political context that directly impacts on the opportunity to exercise autonomy.

Silent Carers: The Problem of Derivative Dependency

Some feminists have rejected the notion of autonomy altogether, not even seeking to reconfigure this in terms of 'relational' accounts. They have done so because the political and legal institutions that have emerged from our social contract have over-emphasised 'individual liberty and freedom of action, even as that freedom has resulted in a diminishing of options and autonomy for many, as our society has become more and more unequal'. Critical feminist and legal theorist Martha Fineman argues that the privileging of autonomy has led to an erosion of equality, as it lauds individual self-sufficiency and independence, with concomitant commitment to non-interventionist forms of government.[40] Programs of social welfare or support for disadvantaged groups are considered to be in direct conflict with the aims of autonomy.

39 Peterman et al., 'Pandemics and violence against women and children'.

40 Martha Albertson Fineman, 'The vulnerable subject and the responsive state', *Emory Law Journal* 60, no. 2 (2010): 258.

Fineman suggests that 'our bodily fragility, material needs, and the possibility of messy dependency' should be central to political and legal theories. This has not traditionally been the case, as issues to do with dependency were considered the domain of the private sphere: 'The family is the mechanism by which we privatize, and thus hide dependency and its implications'.[41] Our very social and legal structures have located vulnerability and caretaking within the family unit, which is itself conceptualised within 'a zone of privacy, beyond the scope of state concern, absent extraordinary family failures, such as abuse or neglect'.[42] As a private concern, vulnerability itself has been effaced from public discourse and political interests. The key factors of the human condition are thereby hidden from view. Fineman notes that there are two levels of dependency: inevitable dependency, of the person who requires care; and derivative dependency, of the person who is the caregiver. While we can all find ourselves vulnerable to requiring care at any period of our lives, the role of caregiver is socially imposed through traditional institutions such as the family, but also in broader society in roles and relationships that are themselves gendered.[43] This category of 'derivative dependency' describes the kind of roles taken up by women in response to the global pandemic.

Time spent attending to household and caretaking duties was considerably exacerbated as a direct result of the pandemic. Pre-pandemic, women did about three-quarters of the 16 billion daily hours of 'unpaid work' across the world.[44] This unpaid work has grown significantly as a result of the pandemic. Women in the United States, for instance, spend an extra one and a half to two hours a week and women in India spend an extra 30 per cent of their time on unpaid caregiving.[45] Repeated lockdowns have necessitated working from home, caring for young children at home and home-schooling. As a result, many Western households returned to the gender roles of the 1950s, even if there were two parents who both

41 Fineman, 'The vulnerable subject and the responsive state', 263.
42 Fineman, 'The vulnerable subject and the responsive state', 266.
43 Fineman, 'The vulnerable subject and the responsive state', 263–64.
44 United Nations, 'Whose time to care: Unpaid care and domestic work during Covid-19', *UN Women*, data.unwomen.org/publications/whose-time-care-unpaid-care-and-domestic-work-during-covid-19; International Labour Organisation, *Care Work and Care Jobs: For the Future of Decent Work* (Geneva: International Labour Organisation, 2018).
45 Anu Madgavkar et al., 'Covid-19 and gender equality: Countering the regressive effects', *McKinsey Global Institute*, mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/covid-19-and-gender-equality-countering-the-regressive-effects.

worked full-time or in contexts in which we would expect gender parity.[46] In academia, for example, submissions by women to journals decreased substantially with the onset of the pandemic.[47] For single parents, working full-time while caring for their children was simply not possible. Online home-schooling was also more difficult for migrant families and families of lower socio-economic status who may not have been able to afford the required resources.[48] Thus the global pandemic has further entrenched women in positions of 'underpaid or unpaid' care labour, within a 'private sphere' that has traditionally been hidden from public view, and considered beyond the state's concern.

When schools and childcare are closed in the interests of health and safety, but the concomitant effects are left to be borne by the family, such decisions seem to assume an atomistic version of autonomy for parents who are actually examples of 'derivative dependency'. Such decisions therefore obfuscate the gender inequalities that are likely to arise as a direct result of public health interventions. Even if those making such decisions assumed that the burdens of housework and caregiving were distributed evenly among the sexes (which, undoubtedly, is not the case), parents would still effectively be penalised for having caring responsibilities, even if these penalties did not fall disproportionately on one gender. To date, the very institutions that require change in order to facilitate richer notions of autonomy are themselves constituted in such a way that they reify the status quo of the self-interested, independent, rational contractors, relegating questions of care and vulnerability to the (unpaid and unrecognised) private sphere.

46 Regan M. Johnston, Anwar Mohammed and Clifton van der Linden, 'Evidence of exacerbated gender inequality in child care obligations in Canada and Australia during the Covid-19 pandemic', *Politics & Gender* 16, no. 4 (2020): 1131–41; Carmen de Paz et al., 'Gender dimensions of the Covid-19 pandemic', *World Bank*, openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/33622; Jaerim Lee, Meejung Chin and Miai Sung, 'How has Covid-19 changed family life and well-being in Korea?', *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 51, no. 3-4 (2020): 301–13; Abbie E. Goldberg, Nora McCormick and Haylie Virginia, 'Parenting in a pandemic: Work–family arrangements, well-being, and intimate relationships among adoptive parents', *Family Relations* 70, no. 1 (2021): 7–25.

47 Colleen Flaherty, 'No room of one's own', *Inside Higher Ed*, 21 April 2020, insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/21/early-journal-submission-data-suggest-covid-19-tanking-womens-research-productivity.

48 Kristin van Barneveld et al., 'The Covid-19 pandemic: Lessons on building more equal and sustainable societies', *The Economic and Labour Relations Review* 31, no. 2 (2020): 133–57.

Reframing Policy through Relational Autonomy

The global pandemic exposed existing vulnerabilities in the way political power is distributed. Exposing these vulnerabilities shows it may not be enough to simply include women at higher levels of decision-making around Covid-19 responses. The following example illustrates how the liberal state's support during the pandemic has inadvertently added to growing inequality for women, despite incorporating women's voices in decision-making processes. The number of women represented in the Australian Parliament has risen from 31 per cent to 38 per cent in the recent general election.[49] Yet, the Australian government's stimulus measures during the lockdowns predominantly benefitted men, despite the fact that more women lost jobs during the pandemic.[50] An example of this was the JobKeeper program (2020–21) that subsidised the wages of salaried employees but not casuals. Women comprise the majority of casual employees, working in sectors such as retail, travel, hospitality and education—sectors that were most adversely affected by the pandemic.[51] As a result, many casual employees lost their jobs and many women also had to stop casual work to care for children during lockdown.[52] The loss of casual employment for many women is likely to have had flow-on effects for those suffering from domestic violence, as a loss of financial independence would have made it more difficult to leave a violent partner. In this way, the government's failure to account for questions of care and vulnerability—essential aspects of the relational autonomous subject—can be seen to have offset some of the increased funding it gave to organisations providing support to victims of domestic violence. Further financial stimulus initiatives also focused on sectors such as construction that were of little benefit to casuals, the former comprising mostly men and the latter mostly women.[53] To assume that incorporating women's

49 Lisa Visentin and Katina Curtis, 'Record number of women in the 47th parliament, as female voters shun Liberals', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 May 2022, smh.com.au/politics/federal/record-number-of-women-in-the-47th-parliament-as-female-voters-shun-liberals-20220531-p5apxg.html.

50 David Richardson and Richard Denniss, 'Gender experiences during the Covid-19 lockdown', *The Australia Institute*, australiainstitute.org.au/report/gender-experiences-during-the-covid-19-lockdown/.

51 P.N. Junankar, 'The Impact of the Global Financial Crisis on youth unemployment', *The Economic and Labour Relations Review* 26, no. 2 (2015): 191–217.

52 Clare Wenham et al., 'Women are most affected by pandemics—lessons from past outbreaks', *Nature* 583 (2020): 194–98.

53 Richardson and Denniss, 'Gender experiences during the Covid-19 lockdown'.

voices will automatically address the lived vulnerabilities experienced by women in a global pandemic ignores the crucial fact that the social contract between autonomous and independent rational agents remains a flawed ideal; an ideal that fails to see the very power structures that serve to uphold it.

To address the deep-seated structural inequality that forms the basis of neoliberal democracies, Fineman suggests that the concept of vulnerability must be detached from its association with specific groups—caregivers, for example. Instead, it must be recognised as 'the very meaning of what it means to be human' that must also be at 'the heart of our ideas of social and state responsibility'. This includes not only 'our bodily vulnerability' but also the 'interruption or destruction of institutional or social relationships', which can have catastrophic effects not only on individual lives, but also on generations of 'socially or culturally determined groupings' such as race, gender, class or religious affiliations.[54] This point is relevant not just for neoliberal democracies but for many other countries, where the Covid-19 pandemic has had disproportionate effects on the employment of women compared with men.[55] It is worth noting that applied ethics in healthcare contexts does retain in some sense this origin story, in which 'bodily vulnerability' is treated as an issue of the individual or private person rather than part of public discourse that considers the values of a flourishing society. Fineman's insights show that structural change is difficult when the backbone of the neoliberal economic model is the 'unpaid economy' of gendered care work.

Conclusion

The disruption of the global pandemic has exacerbated the vulnerabilities of many, including women. Political responses have varied from those that entrench inequalities to interventions that actively seek to address vulnerabilities. In this context, addressing vulnerabilities requires the voices of the vulnerable. But such an act itself may require interrogation of long-held assumptions, particularly the nature of the social contract between citizens and the state. Relational autonomy is one way these long-held assumptions are being interrogated in philosophical contexts

54 Fineman, 'The vulnerable subject and the responsive state', 266–68.
55 van Barneveld et al., 'Lessons on building more equal and sustainable societies'.

but this tends to remain at a theoretical level. Current applied contexts could provide insight for other uses, including political decision-making in a global pandemic, where healthcare is deeply politicised. Nevertheless, this remains difficult.

To assume that incorporating women's voices in decision-making will automatically address the lived vulnerabilities experienced in a global pandemic ignores the fact that the modern social contract based on the values of autonomy and independence continues to pervade contemporary moral and political theory. These values have found a voice since the global pandemic, including within states that seek to return to self-sufficiency and non-interference by international bodies of governance. To the extent that states return to Hobbesian social contract theory in times of crisis, diverse voices will be excluded from decision-making processes. To incorporate women's voices and knowledge into such a climate will be challenging indeed. Yet we need not be discouraged. Instead, we could consider the current situation as an opportunity to practise renewed inward reflection, together with honest public conversations.

Do we want political, legal and economic institutions in the West to continue to operate on the assumption that individuals are self-interested, independent and rational contractors? We have argued that such a model fails to provide adequate recognition of the deeply gendered nature of work itself. Moreover, we have suggested that such a model fails to recognise the interpersonal dimensions of action and decision-making that occurs within complex social contexts. Relational autonomy offers a model to address issues of entrenched gender inequality that have emerged as a result of Covid-19. It does so by offering a model for a political–social contract that recognises both individual freedom and the value of existing caregiving commitments and responsibilities. By reconfiguring notions of autonomy that account for interpersonal relationships in actions and decisions, we are better able to support *all* members of society, without excluding those whose circumstances and responsibilities are very much enmeshed with others.

Vegetarians, Vivisection and Violationism: Gender and the Non-Human Animal in Anna Kingsford's Life and Writing

Ruby Ekkel
University of St Andrews

Abstract

Anna Kingsford (1846–1888) was an influential figure within the Victorian vegetarian movement who argued that abstinence from meat laid the foundation for all physical, social, moral and spiritual progress. Like many other vegetarian women of the later nineteenth century, she also actively opposed the practice of vivisection—operating on live animals for scientific or medical purposes—and was deeply engaged in the 'woman question' of her period. This article addresses Kingsford's ideas about non-human animals and gender and examines the complex relationships between them. It argues that Kingsford's vegetarianism lay at the centre of her world view and profoundly shaped her engagement with antivivisectionism and feminism. Through an investigation of her intertwined commitments to animal and women's causes, Kingsford's multifaceted and deeply considered conceptualisation of animals is reconstructed: one which was founded on scientific research, spiritual beliefs and personal experience. This conceptualisation closely interacted with, but was not merely an extension of, her ideas about femininity, gender and women's emancipation. In foregrounding Kingsford's vegetarianism, a movement frequently overlooked in existing scholarship on Victorian reformism and politics, this article challenges accounts that subsume the nuanced ideas of vegetarians and other animal protectionists within purportedly more significant causes.

* * *

> I always speak with the greatest delight and satisfaction in the presence of my friends the members of the Vegetarian Society. With them I am quite at my ease, I have no reservation, I have no dissatisfaction. This is not the case when I speak for my friends the Anti-Vivisectionists, the Anti-Vaccinationists, the Spiritualists, or the advocates of freedom for women. I always feel that such of these as are not abstainers from flesh-food have unstable ground under their feet, and it is my great regret that, when helping them in their good works, I cannot openly and publicly maintain what I so ardently believe—that the Vegetarian movement is the bottom and basis of all other movements towards Purity, Freedom, Justice, and Happiness.[1]

Anna Kingsford (1846–1888) was an active antivivisectionist, women's emancipationist, author, mystic, one of the first British women to qualify as a doctor and a passionate vegetarian. Kingsford's refusal to eat animals, as the above address to the Vegetarian Society makes clear, was not a quirky addendum to her list of accomplishments, but the foundation of her philosophy, activism and lived experience. Although she is well known for her ferocious opposition to vivisection—the scientific practice of experimenting on live animals—and, to a lesser-extent, for her vocal feminism, she felt far more aligned with vegetarians than with antivivisectionists and women's emancipationists, whose concern for the vulnerable largely did not extend to those killed and consumed as meat.

Despite her significant influence on the animal protectionist movement and the extensiveness of her published writings, dedicated histories of Kingsford's life and ideas are scarce. Her closest collaborator, Edward Maitland, published a self-aggrandising posthumous biography in 1913, featuring extended extracts from her diaries and letters, which were subsequently destroyed. Maitland's magnanimous and controversial biography remained the only comprehensive account of Kingsford's life until Alan Pert's idiosyncratic, New Age–style biography, *Red Cactus*, was published in 2006.[2] Where her life and thinking have been studied at a scholarly level, Kingsford's causes are typically addressed in isolation or, at least, in isolation from the vegetarianism she held so dearly. In a recent article, philosopher Mitch Goldsmith addresses Kingsford's

1 Anna Kingsford, 'Address to the Vegetarian Society of London (1870)', in *Addresses and Essays on Vegetarianism*, ed. Samuel Hopgood Hart (London: J.M. Watkins, 1912), 145.

2 Edward Maitland, *Anna Kingsford: Her Life, Letters, Diary and Work*, 2 vols. (London: John. M. Watkins, 1896); Alan Pert, *Red Cactus: The Life of Anna Kingsford* (New South Wales: Books and Writers, 2006).

view of animal experimentation as 'malevolent sorcery' and considers its implications for modern debates in animal ethics.[3] Alison Butler makes a similar argument, presenting Kingsford's antivivisectionism as an attempt to reconcile modern science with religion in its purest forms.[4] In Christine Ferguson's compelling denouncement of Kingsford and other women's omission from studies of the intersections of Victorian science and spiritualism, vegetarianism is also notably absent.[5] Here, as elsewhere, Kingsford's antivivisectionism dominates historical analysis to the near erasure of her vegetarianism, despite its explicit centrality to Kingsford's scientific, spiritualist and antivivisectionist beliefs.

This article seeks to take Kingsford's vegetarianism seriously, analysing how her conceptualisation of non-human animals closely interacted with, but was not merely an extension of, her ideas about femininity, gender and women's emancipation. In wider histories of Victorian vegetarianism and the better-trod territory of antivivisectionism, Kingsford is often presented as an eccentric exception to more general trends, or, more crudely, as a comically strange 'crank'. In his article on the 'animal limits' of Victorian environmental thought, Jed Mayer references Kingsford as a multifaceted exception—'vegetarian, anti-vivisectionist, medical reformer, feminist, and mystic'—to the rule of singlemindedness that he argues was responsible for the fractious relationship between nineteenth-century animal rights and environmentalist movements.[6] Contrastingly, and inaccurately, Coral Lansbury depicts Kingsford as a narrowly animal-focused reformer, in contrast to other humanitarians for whom animal protection was one of a suite of interconnected causes.[7] Richard French's study of antivivisection and medicine in Victorian Britain describes Kingsford as a 'bizarre' exemplification of antivivisectionists'

3 Mitch Goldsmith, 'The unfinished business of Anna Kingsford – Towards an enchanted animal ethic', *TRACE ∴ Journal for Human-Animal Studies* 7 (2021): doi.org/10.23984/fjhas.99270.

4 Alison Butler, 'Anna Kingsford: Scientist and sorceress', in *Repositioning Victorian Sciences: Shifting Centres in Nineteenth-Century Scientific Thinking*, ed. David Clifford, Elisabeth Wadge, Alex Warwick, and Martin Willis (London: Anthem Press, 2006), 59–70.

5 Christine Ferguson, 'Anna Kingsford and the intuitive science of occultism', *Aries* 22, no. 1 (2021): 114–35.

6 Jed Mayer, 'Edward Carpenter, Henry Salt, and the animal limits of Victorian environments', in *Victorian Writers and the Environment*, ed. Laurence W. Mazzeno and Ronald D. Morrison (London: Routledge, 2016), 222.

7 Coral Lansbury, *The Old Brown Dog: Women, Workers and Vivisection in Edwardian England* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 83.

alleged psychological disturbance, and attributes the intensity of her activism to a frenzied attempt to achieve emotional catharsis in an unsettled moral and intellectual landscape.[8]

Kingsford's treatment reflects a historiographical tendency to dismiss vegetarians as kooks or generally unhinged individuals who occupied the 'edge of madness'.[9] In this frame of reference, vegetarianism is treated as faddish and vaguely comical, or so odd as to make serious analysis of its adherents' countercultural views and practices unnecessary. James Turner, for example, reduces Henry Salt's vegetarianism to a 'passion for vegetables', and details Joseph Ritson's later-life decline into 'lunacy' as an implicit criticism of his influential vegetarian tract.[10] Such accounts can also treat the movement as an expression of social forces almost completely disconnected from animals themselves. Turner argues that Victorian-era animal advocacy was mainly a displacement of class guilt by middle-class and aristocratic Britons unwilling to extend the compassion to fellow humans in the lower classes.[11] As Brian Harrison has argued, such historical interpretations risk overlooking 'more obvious' motivations for humanitarian conduct towards animals, namely a genuine concern for the increasingly visible and increasing suffering through intensified consumption of animals in this period.[12] They also risk uncritically reproducing mainstream Victorian assumptions about vegetarians' madness or political irrelevance.

Vegetarian women in particular have been subject to trivialisation and pathologisation by contemporaries and historians. Brian Luke has highlighted the ways in which women's resistance to animal exploitation, often dubbed 'hysteria' or 'sentiment', is frequently interpreted as a 'biosexual phenomenon to be ignored or subdued' rather than a substantive moral or political challenge.[13] Recent work in the field of animal studies has further underlined how characterisations of animal protection as feminine and 'crazy' redirect attention away from broader societal issues

8 Richard French, *Antivivisection and Medical Science in Victorian Society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 390–91.

9 James Turner, *Reckoning with the Beast: Animals, Pain, and Humanity in the Victorian Mind* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1980), 19.

10 Turner, *Reckoning with the Beast*, 136, 18.

11 Turner, *Reckoning with the Beast*, 19.

12 Brian Harrison, 'Campaigners against cruelty', *Times Literary Supplement*, 29 January 1982.

13 Brian Luke, 'Taming ourselves or going feral? Toward a nonpatriarchal metaethic of animal liberation', in *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*, ed. Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 239.

surrounding animal abuse.[14] Ecofeminist scholarship and the developing 'animal turn' have fed a growing interest in the historical and intellectual relationship between animal protectionism and feminism. Despite this, pioneering ecofeminist scholar Carol Adams has identified a persistent tendency to 'explain away' rather than 'explain' women's vegetarianism and animal advocacy, as well as a propensity for treating it as a secondary appendage to, or an interesting lens into, more important human-focused concerns like suffrage or abolitionism.[15] James Gregory has also pointed out the need for a closer study of the connections between vegetarianism and femininity in a specifically British context.[16]

Noting these absences and possibilities, this article analyses Kingsford's vegetarianism as a belief system and way of life by investigating concepts of gender and the non-human animal in her life and writing. Kingsford's vegetarianism is analysed in relationship to the causes of antivivisection and feminism, without being reduced to a lens through which to view other, purportedly more valid, human-centric ideas. Drawing primarily on Maitland's biography, Kingsford's own extensive writings, the work of her animal protectionist contemporaries and newspaper reports, this article argues that Kingsford's concepts of the non-human animal and gender were tightly interrelated in ways previously unappreciated. However, she drew no simple parallels between the oppression of women and non-human animals; rather, she saw women, with their allegedly natural caring qualities, as holding a special responsibility to act as vulnerable animals' caretakers and protectors. By focusing on her understanding of animals and women as a vegetarian, we avoid an approach to Kingsford and other animal advocates that reads animal protectionism primarily as an insight into other causes or anxieties.

14 Lori Gruen and Fiona Probyn-Rapsey, ed., *Animaladies: Gender, Animals, and Madness* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 2.

15 Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, 20th anniversary edition (New York: Continuum, 2010), 138. See, for example, the attribution of Elizabeth Blackwell's antivivisectionism to childhood trauma in N. Roth, 'The personalities of two pioneer medical women: Elizabeth Blackwell and Elizabeth Garrett Anderson', *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 47, no. 1 (1971): 67–79.

16 James Gregory, *Of Victorians and Vegetarians: The Vegetarian Movement in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), 161.

Vegetarianism

As a vegetarian, Anna Kingsford formed part of the growing animal protection movement in later nineteenth-century Britain. Although concern about cruelty towards animals was not a new phenomenon, a protectionist attitude gained considerable ground and publicity from the 1820s, driven by a range of influences including increased contact with suffering animals in cities, attempts to suppress undesirable behaviour amongst the lower classes and urban removal from livestock farming. The shift in attitude, which found its lasting expression in the emergence of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), was so pronounced that care for animals came to be seen as a peculiarly English trait.[17]

Vegetarianism was arguably the most subversive element of this movement for animal protection, extending the principles of the humane establishment to animals typically consumed for meat and clothing. The vegetarian movement, also known at the time as the 'Pythagoreanism', attracted a growing number of people who chose to eschew meat for moral, social, religious and health reasons. It could be, as Rebecca Nesvet asserts, simultaneously a practice, ethos, source of identity and political affiliation for its adherents.[18] Diverse concerns about adulteration of meat products, food scarcity and children's health intermingled and occasionally clashed with discourses of animal rights and spiritual fulfilment. The Vegetarian Society, founded in Manchester in 1847, grew rapidly in its first 10 years, while the number of vegetarian newspapers, tearooms and restaurants multiplied to cater to non-meat-eaters' requirements and interests.[19] The society claimed to distribute 5,000 copies of one of its associated journals, the *Vegetarian Messenger*, each month.[20] Although men such as Henry Salt, George Bernard Shaw and Edward Carpenter are most famously associated with Victorian vegetarianism, women were a significant presence within the movement, including writers such as

17 Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 129; Brian Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom: Stability and Change in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 103.

18 Rebecca Nesvet, 'Vegetarianism', in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Victorian Women's Writing*, ed. Lesa Scholl and Emily Morris (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 1.

19 Hilda Kean, *Animal Rights: Political and Social Change in Britain Since 1800* (London: Reaktion Books, 1998), 123–24.

20 Liam Young, 'Newman's conversion: Francis William Newman and vegetarianism on the instalment plan', *Victorian Periodicals Review* 52, no. 1 (2019): 176.

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, Martha Brotherton and Beatrice Webb. These authors, like Kingsford, promoted vegetarianism as an avenue towards radical social change.[21]

Part of the reason that vegetarians have received little attention from historians is that they were relatively small in number and often associated with other 'fringe' or 'radical' groups. In his history of vegetarianism, Colin Spencer theorises that meat abstention can be interpreted as an unsettling challenge to societal foundations, thus provoking suspicion or ridicule.[22] It is true that many leading vegetarian figures, such as Kingsford, Henry Salt and Edward Carpenter, saw the rejection of violence towards animals as a foundational element of a much larger societal transformation. This meat-free utopianism, often associated with spiritualism and Theosophy, set many vegetarians apart from their meat-eating peers in the animal protection movement.[23] Indeed, an association with vegetarianism, both in contemporary sources and in more recent histories of the animal rights movement, is liable to be seen as evidence of a group's frivolousness, unacceptable radicalism or decline.[24] For example, H. M. Hyndman, the leader of the Social Democratic Federation, criticised his colleague for associating with the radical vegetarian Edward Carpenter, telling him, 'I do not want the movement [for scientific socialism] to be a depository of old cranks, humanitarians, vegetarians, anti-vivisectionists, arty-crafties and all the rest'.[25] Despite these reservations, vegetarians like Kingsford often worked in uneasy alliance with antivivisectionists and other animal welfare campaigners.

Influenced by her older brother, Kingsford became a vegetarian at a young age. She enjoyed hunting as a young woman but gave up the pastime after imagining the experience from the hunted animal's perspective.[26] In 1874, Kingsford commenced studies at the *Ecole de médecine* in Paris, with the purpose of furthering her fourfold goals: 'purity of diet [vegetarianism],

21 Nesvet, 'Vegetarianism', 1.

22 Colin Spencer, *The Heretic's Feast: A History of Vegetarianism* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1995), 293.

23 Elsa Richardson, 'Man is not a meat-eating animal: Vegetarians and evolution in late-Victorian Britain', *Victorian Review* 45, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 119.

24 Ritvo attempted to convey the decline of antivivisection in the twentieth century by explaining that it appealed only to 'an assortment of feminist, labour activists, vegetarians, spiritualists, and others who did not fit easily into the established order of society'. Ritvo, *Animal Estate*, 162.

25 Quoted in Sheila Rowbotham, '"Commanding the heart": Edward Carpenter and friends', in *Victorian Values*, ed. Gordon Marsden (New York: Longman Publishing, 2014), 252.

26 Samuel Hopgood Hart, 'Biographical preface', in *Addresses and Essays*, 2.

compassion for the animals, the exaltation of womanhood, and mental and moral unfoldment through the purification of the organism'.[27] After graduating the following year, her thesis, *The Perfect Way in Diet*,[28] was published in French, German and English and garnered recognition in the vegetarian movement in Britain and abroad. The book outlines some of the social, political, moral and spiritual beliefs about animals and humanity that underpinned Kingsford's commitment to vegetarianism.

Kingsford based much of her vegetarian advocacy on scientific considerations, arguing that better treatment of animals would lead to the betterment of humans both medically and societally. The first chapter of *The Perfect Way in Diet* draws on biological research to argue that human anatomy has more in common with herbivorous and frugivorous animals than with carnivores. Kingsford analysed the shape and function of animal and human digestive tracts, brains, teeth and facial structures, concluding that 'mankind are naturally frugivorous'.[29] In her speeches, she used more emotive justifications for humanity's 'natural' vegetarianism, characterising humans as fundamentally compassionate, gentle beings with an inherent aversion to bloodshed. If 'man' were indeed suited to carnivorism, she argued, he would surely share 'the savage disposition of the carnivora; it would be a pleasure to him to kill and tear his victim, and the sight of blood would be an agreeable titillation to his hunger'.[30]

Tied to the idea that humans were not adapted to eat meat was Kingsford's belief that vegetarian foods were health-promoting. She endorsed fruits, vegetables and legumes as 'the best and purest forms of human alimentation', while meats were cast as the purveyors of disease and physical degradation. She attributed her own continued vitality, despite multiple chronic health conditions, to the 'simple, pure and unexciting diet which for a period of 10 years I have uninterruptedly maintained'. Kingsford ignored doctors' orders to eat raw meat, even when warned of imminent death if she refused.[31] Even in non-vegetarian publications, she prescribed meat abstention for conditions including obesity, leanness, skin inflammation and tooth decay.[32]

---

27 Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, vol. 1, 20.

28 Anna Bonus Kingsford, *The Perfect Way in Diet. A Treatise Advocating a Return to the Natural and Ancient Food of our Race* (London: K. Paul, French, Trübner & Co., 1881).

29 Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, vol. 1, 16.

30 Anna Kingsford, 'Some aspects of vegetarianism', in *Addresses and Essays*, 130–31.

31 Anna Kingsford, 'A lecture on food', in *Addresses and Essays*, 87.

32 Anna Kingsford, *Health, Beauty and the Toilet: Letters to Ladies from a Lady Doctor* (London: F. Warne, 1886), 11, 24, 101, 196.

Kingsford paired scientific argumentation and personal testimony with disturbing descriptions of the reality of meat-eating to drive home her argument that humans do not naturally 'subsist upon carnage'.[33] She repeatedly critiqued the practice of butchering, cooking and renaming meat products so that the animal's dead body was erased, seeing these practices as evidence of humankind's innate vegetarianism. According to Carol Adams, the function of the absent referent in meat eating is to make absent the individual, once living animal that has been killed in the production of a butchered, cooked, renamed piece of meat.[34] Kingsford describes this phenomenon explicitly, identifying 'the veil … between the fashionable dining-room and the slaughter-house', which hid the unpalatable truth from polite, meat-eating society:[35]

> How I should like to compel all flesh-eating men and women to kill their own meat! Conceive the delicate lady of the period going out, knife in hand, to slaughter her victims for the next day's dinner! Imagine the clergyman, whose mission it is to preach mercy and benevolence, taking his pole-axe from the shelf and sallying forth to his cattle-shed intent on taking innocent life! What a vulgar picture![36]

Beyond physical ailments, Kingsford charged meat-eating with causing serious moral and social degradation in both producers and consumers. She wrote extensively about the detrimental effects of butchery on butchers, arguing that civilised society should not permit the existence of a trade so 'disgusting, brutalising, and unwholesome'. She worried that in executing 'wholesale massacres' on a daily basis, meat workers were 'deprived of all chance of becoming themselves civilised', and lambasted polite society for profiting from butchers while disdaining them as representatives of barbarity.[37] Like many vegetarians, the majority of whom practised temperance, Kingsford linked meat-eating with the desire for strong alcohol. As evidence, she cited some hospitals' practice of enforcing a vegetarian diet for their alcoholic patients. Less plausibly, she saw the frequent proximity of slaughterhouses to drinking establishments as further evidence of meat's capacity to incite alcohol consumption, even in the process of its production.[38]

---

33 Ninon [Anna] Kingsford, 'Art. VIII.—The best food for man', *Westminster Review* 46, no. 2 (1874): 510.

34 Adams, *Sexual Politics*, 20–22, 142.

35 Kingsford, 'Lecture on food', 96.

36 Kingsford, 'Some aspects of vegetarianism', 131.

37 Anna Kingsford, *The Perfect Way in Diet*, 61–62.

38 Anna Kingsford, 'Best food for man', in *Addresses and Essays*, 103.

Vegetarianism was also urged as a societal corrective to prostitution. Kingsford believed that the stimulating and irritating quality of meat products 'influences the genital functions in a powerful degree, and sets up a condition of pressing insatiability' in men. Prostitution was chiefly caused, she contended, by the 'luxurious and intemperate habits of eating and drinking', which she claimed were common among the upper classes. 'Abolish kreophagy [meat-eating] and its companion vice, alcoholism', she urged, 'and more, a thousandfold, will be done to abolish prostitution than can be achieved by any other means soever'.[39] By contrast to the morally corrosive nature of meat-eating, vegetarianism was promoted by Kingsford and other proponents as having the tendency to 'exalt the philanthropic faculties'.[40] It should be stressed, however, that these impacts were only part of Kingsford's larger rationale for vegetarianism, one that foregrounded the right of animals to live free from human-inflicted suffering.

These scientific and social rationales were closely intertwined with Kingsford's distinctive spiritual beliefs. She saw no contradiction in this blended approach, stating that vegetarianism 'appeals to the in-tuitional as well as to the intellectual faculties'.[41] As Samantha Calvert notes in her study of vegetarianism and modern Christianity, the mid-to-late 1800s witnessed the growth of religious and spiritual movements that rejected many of the traditions and anxieties of conventional Christianity.[42] Theosophy was one such influential system of thought, which formed part of a broader esoteric culture in late Victorian counter-cultural circles.[43] Kingsford was a dedicated adherent, along with other prominent women vegetarians including leading spiritualist Annie Besant and, later, the suffragist Margaret Cousins. Theosophy offered an alternative to scientific materialism and conventional Christianity and was especially popular with women, who were granted cosmologically justified equality as well as leadership opportunities.[44] As a Theosophist, Kingsford believed

39 Kingsford, *Perfect Way in Diet*, 58–59. Kingsford often referred to meat-eating as 'kreophagy'.

40 Charles W. Forward, *Fifty Years of Food Reform: A History of the Vegetarian Movement in England* (London: Ideal Pub. Union, 1898), 62.

41 Anna Kingsford, 'Letters on pure diet', in *Addresses and Essays*, 64.

42 Samantha Jane Calvert, 'A taste of Eden: Modern Christianity and vegetarianism', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 58, no. 3 (July 2007): 477.

43 Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, vol. 2, 123.

44 Leah Leneman, 'The awakened instinct: Vegetarianism and the women's suffrage movement in Britain', *Women's History Review* 6, no. 2 (June 1997): 277; Diana Burfield, 'Theosophy and feminism: Some explorations in nineteenth-century biography' in *Women's Religious Experience: Cross Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Pat Holden (London: Croom Helm, 1983), 35–36.

in the necessity of a radically new way of life: the 'perfect way' described in her vegetarian and spiritualist tracts. She argued that modern Victorian society was a deeply flawed pseudo-civilisation, and posited an alternative, authentic civilisation founded on care for animals, women's equality, non-violence and spiritual fulfilment. Kingsford sought to recover an ancient and untainted version of religion and society that would bring humankind into harmony with God and the environment.

Crucially, this new world would be vegetarian.[45] Respect for animals would not be a side-effect of this new spiritually fulfilled age, but its very catalyst and foundation. She recounted visions and dreams of the 'sabbath of perfection' to come, in which animal suffering disappeared as the Biblical Fall was reversed.[46] Meat-eating appeared as 'the baneful coil of hydra-headed Vice, whose ever-renewing heads we vainly strike, while leaving the body of the dragon untouched'.[47] These experiences confirmed for Kingsford the foundational importance of vegetarianism in any kind of substantive moral, social or religious progress. For this reason Kingsford felt most comfortable speaking amongst the ranks of the Vegetarian Society, with whom she felt she shared the belief that vegetarianism was the 'bottom and basis' of all other social and spiritual development.[48] Kingsford affirmed again and again that no progress, including world peace, women's equality and even the restoration of paradise, could be meaningfully achieved without a basis in abstinence from meat.[49]

Kingsford's call for an idealised vegetarian future inspired by 'primitive' lifestyles engaged explicitly with colonial ideologies. She cited approvingly the vegetarian or near-vegetarian diets of many indigenous populations, detailing their impressive physical capabilities as evidence of the diet's healthiness.[50] And, like many British vegetarians of the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, she was enthusiastic about Hindu and Buddhist thinking and practices. *The Perfect Way in Diet*, for example, begins with a quotation from Buddha, who entreats a king not to make animal

45 Kingsford, *Perfect Way in Diet*, 118.

46 Anna Kingsford and Edward Maitland, *The Perfect Way; or, The Finding of Christ* (London: John M. Watkins, 1882), 211–13.

47 Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, vol. 1, 248–49.

48 Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, vol. 2, 223. For a contemporary iteration of this argument about the broader political potential of veganism/vegetarianism, see Annie Potts and Philip Armstrong, 'Vegan', in *Critical Terms for Animal Studies*, ed. Lori Gruen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 305–409.

49 Kingsford, 'The best food for man', 510; Hart, 'Biographical preface', *Addresses and Essays*, 41.

50 Kingsford, *Perfect Way in Diet*, 20–37.

sacrifices because 'all Life is linked and kin'.[51] However, an assumption of white superiority is evident in some of Kingsford's argumentation. After contending that a shift to vegetarian farming could sustain larger populations, she cautioned that meat dependent white populations risked being overwhelmed:

> By restricting the production of offspring in the most highly developed races, or in the most highly cultivated families of any race, the future of the world is virtually abandoned to the lowest types, and these would thus be enabled before long completely to outnumber and suppress the higher.[52]

Rather than reducing numbers of children according to the Malthusian logic salient at the time, she argued that Europeans should adopt land efficient vegetarianism to secure their safe food production and global dominance. Although this idea gained little currency in mainstream discussions about population, her argument inverted an established colonial narrative that vegetarianism made colonised people in India feeble and easier to dominate. The belief that meat abstention could expand, secure, reinvigorate or cleanse white populations was an enduring current of thought in European vegetarianism and associated 'back-to-nature' movements.[53] Half a century later, the vegetarian rhetoric of purification and physical cleansing would be chillingly adopted by fascists in Germany, the United States and elsewhere.[54] Although most Europeans would have disagreed with her proposed methods, Kingsford's urging of the need for the preservation of European supremacy was one of her less controversial ideas.

Despite a fractious relationship with traditional Christianity, Kingsford frequently justified animals' worth and value in biblical terms. She challenged the prevailing belief that Jesus ate meat, arguing that the Bible obliquely revealed otherwise.[55] In one of her earliest novels, a vegetarian character appeals to the saintly meat-free examples of John the Baptist, Catherine of Siena and Francis of Assisi.[56] Kingsford wrote approvingly of

51 Kingsford, *Perfect Way in Diet*, x–xi.
52 Kingsford, *Perfect Way in Diet*, 97.
53 Tristram Stuart, *The Bloodless Revolution: A Cultural History of Vegetarianism: From 1600 to Modern Times*, illustrated edition (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), 399–417, 424.
54 Stuart, *The Bloodless Revolution*, 436.
55 Kingsford, 'Letters on pure diet', 68.
56 Anna Kingsford, *In My Lady's Chamber: A Speculative Romance, Touching a Few Questions of the Day* (London: J. Burns, 1873), 244.

Saint Francis's depiction of animals as 'living souls with whom, as well as with the sons of men, God's covenant is made'. She provided the caveat that even if animals in fact did *not* have souls and the attendant prospect of eternal life, it was an even worse crime to fill their fleeting existences with suffering.[57] After granting animals the possibility of immortal souls, it was a natural step to bestow them with admirable personality traits. Like many Victorian animal protectionists, Kingsford heightened sympathetic readers' indignation by asserting animals' good moral character: cows were 'patient' and seals 'gentle and intelligent'.[58] At a personal level, she referred to a horse as her friend and professed to prefer the company of her guinea pig Rufus over human companionship.[59]

For Kingsford, non-human animals represented vessels for improving humans' societal, moral and physical health, and a means towards universal spiritual redemption. Importantly, they were also independently worthy beings who, despite a lowly status, deserved protection from death and cruelty. To refrain from killing and eating these creatures constituted not only a way to save animals and better society, but the indispensable groundwork for all other forms of authentic progress. In many ways this vegetarianism was the foundation of her philosophy and advocacy, and it deeply influenced her engagement with another, more popular aspect of animal protectionism in the nineteenth century: the fight against vivisection.

Antivivisectionism and Vegetarianism

The Victorian antivivisectionist movement encompassed adherents of widely varying political and religious persuasions, united by moral opposition to vivisection. As the practice became more common in British laboratories, opposition flourished in a range of societies and publications. Despite provoking significant hostility and ridicule, the movement attracted the support of many public figures including George Bernard Shaw, Henry Salt, Frances Cobbe, John Henry Newman, Edward Carpenter, Elizabeth Blackwell and, later, Louise Lind af-Hageby. Rank-

57 Anna Kingsford, 'From addresses to vegetarians', in *Addresses and Essays*, 150; Kingsford, 'Lecture on food', 97.
58 Ritvo, *Animal Estate*, 142; Anna Kingsford, *Health, Beauty and the Toilet*, 16; Kingsford, *Perfect Way in Diet*, 63.
59 Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, vol. 2, 54.

and-file antivivisectionists were typically middle class, although Coral Lansbury has revealed high levels of working-class sympathy during the Brown Dog riots of 1907.[60] A striking proportion of participants were women, an observation that has underwritten persistent characterisations of the movement as the preserve of 'hysterical' women and a few aberrantly sentimental men.[61] Antivivisectionists' advocacy usually constituted both a protest against the specific procedures of vivisection, and a more general rejection of a social order that permitted the 'smooth cool men of science' to sacrifice the vulnerable, a category that might also include women and children, for the end of human 'progress'.[62]

Although vegetarians almost universally opposed vivisection, most antivivisectionists focused on the particular evil of vivisection and were less concerned with other forms of animal suffering and death. The 'arms-length' relationship between vegetarianism and antivivisectionism can be largely attributed to the difference in scope where it came to the neighbouring movements' ambitions. Whereas Victorian vegetarians typically sought large-scale societal and spiritual transformation, antivivisectionists held narrower goals, achievable via practical legislative reform.[63] For Frances Power Cobbe, an active leader of the antivivisectionist movement with whom Kingsford sometimes clashed, the act of vivisection was a moral outrage demanding all her formidable campaigning energies, to the exclusion of other animal-related issues including their slaughter for food.[64] The incompatibility of the movements opened antivivisectionists to accusations of hypocrisy and inconsistency, as many within the movement were painfully aware. George Bernard Shaw, an antivivisectionist and vegetarian, complained of finding himself 'on the same platform with fox hunters, tame stag hunters, men and women whose calendar was divided … by seasons for killing animals for sport'.[65]

60 Lansbury, *Old Brown Dog*, 23.

61 Mary Ann Elston, 'Women and anti-vivisection in Victorian England, 1870–1900', in *Vivisection in Historical Perspective*, ed. N. A. Rupke (London: Croom Helm, 1987), 247; Charles Darwin gave an insight into the gender dynamics of the antivivisection movement by joking that the antivivisectionist R. H. Hutton 'seems to be a kind of *female Miss Cobbe*'. 'Literary notes', *British Medical Journal* 1 (28 May 1904): 1266.

62 Hilda Kean, 'The "Smooth Cool Men of Science": The feminist and socialist response to vivisection', *History Workshop Journal*, no. 40 (1995): 16; Ritvo, *Animal Estate*, 164.

63 French, *Antivivisection and Medical Science*, 213; Leneman, 'The awakened instinct', 282.

64 Turner, *Reckoning*, 90.

65 George Bernard Shaw, *The Doctor's Dilemma: Prefaces on Doctors* (1906; Urbana, IL: Project Gutenberg, 2009).

For Kingsford, however, opposition to vivisection was in many ways an extension of her dual vegetarian impulse to save lowly and innocent animals, and to promote the spiritual uplift of human society. She saw vegetarianism and antivivisectionism as coupled because the practices they combated were deeply connected, asserting in a lecture at Girton College, Cambridge, that 'Flesh-eating and vivisection are in principle closely related, and both are defended by their advocates on common premises, of which the catch-cries are Utility and the Law of Nature'. Thus, for Kingsford, antivivisectionism and vegetarianism constituted parts of the same struggle against a society governed by 'men who inculcate on human beings the diet of the tiger, and who teach science by the method of the Spanish Inquisition'.[66] She viewed vivisection as a cruel and unjust assault on a soul possessing being with as much right to life as herself, and as a dangerous attack on the principles of religion, science and civilisation. Although she adapted her antivivisectionism to different audiences, theoretical explanations ultimately came second to her profound sorrow for the vivisected animal, for whose suffering she felt intense and painful sympathy.

Kingsford employed spiritual assaults against prominent vivisectors, attempting to make herself a 'spiritual thunderbolt' against the men she claimed as her foes.[67] Embarrassingly for those antivivisectionists like Cobbe, who did not want the cause associated with such startling esotericism, she appeared to be relatively successful: Kingsford joyfully claimed responsibility for the premature deaths of well-known scientists and vivisectionists Claude Bernard and Paul Bert.[68] These scandalous attacks have contributed to her historiographical positioning as an eccentric extremist within the antivivisectionist movement, either an uncharacteristic anomaly or a radical manifestation of troubling underlying impulses within the movement. French, for example, takes Kingsford's more extravagant gestures as an overt expression of a general antivivisectionist wish for 'conspicuously public adherence to certain moral values', rather than for ending vivisection. Kingsford's behaviour, he contends, 'was only the extreme case of the antivivisectionist attempt

66 Kingsford, 'Lecture on food', 97.

67 Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, vol. 1, 251. Pert argues that the attempted spiritual attacks are likely Maitland's invention, inspired by jealousy and thwarted affection, and aimed at tarnishing her reputation. Maitland's continued admiration and praise of his companion after her death makes this unlikely. Pert, *Red Cactus*, 206–07.

68 Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, vol. 2, 286.

to achieve catharsis of the conflicts that arose when medical science threatened the place of animals in the emotional life of the Victorians'.[69] This is a surprising characterisation of a woman so blatantly unconcerned with any form of social conformity.

Three overlapping concerns characterised Kingsford's opposition to vivisection, each of which were underwritten by a fundamental and visceral concern for animal suffering in its own right. Firstly, she viewed the 'torture' of vivisected animals as a violation of moral and spiritual laws that amounted to a form of diabolical sorcery she labelled 'violationism'.[70] Secondly, vivisection was abhorrent to Kingsford and many other antivivisectionists, particularly Cobbe, because it was practised by those entrusted with a society's medical care, who purported to be leaders of progress and science. The fact that educated and supposedly respectable scientists and doctors were conducting the abuse made the violation far worse and represented the pernicious danger of the new scientific materialism.[71] Thirdly, Kingsford shared the common antivivisectionist concern that the utilitarian principles used to justify vivisection on animals might be extended to vulnerable humans, including women and the poor. Although she would not countenance any utilitarian justification for vivisection, as a doctor she also challenged the efficacy of animal experiments in generating the useful medical knowledge upon which vivisectors pinned their defence.[72] In this position she was supported by other early women doctors, including Elizabeth Blackwell and Frances Hoggan.[73]

Although a detailed exploration of these justifications is beyond the scope of this article, it suffices here to say that Kingsford's antivivisectionism was a complex amalgamation of scientific, spiritual and moral considerations, one that challenges depictions of the antivivisection movement as the last gasp of an anti-modern attitude or as the preserve of 'silly women'—'hysterical' women in Turner's turn of phrase—who were jealous or afraid

69 French, *Antivivisection and Medical Science*, 391.

70 Anna Kingsford, '"Violationism" or sorcery in science', *Theosophical Siftings* 3, no. 5 (1890–91): 1–16.

71 Ritvo, *Animal Estate*, 133.

72 Kingsford, 'Violationism', 11.

73 The Women's Medical Association of New York City, *In Memory of Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell and Dr. Emily Blackwell* (New York: N.Y. Acad. Med., 1911), 76–78; Diana Donald, *Women Against Cruelty: Protection of Animals in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 182. Not all women doctors opposed vivisection. To Francis Hoggan's dismay, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson performed vivisections at her New Hospital for Women. Catriona Blake, *The Charge of the Parasols: Women's Entry to the Medical Profession* (London: The Women's Press, 1990), 150.

of the advancing power of science.[74] It is also important to acknowledge that Kingsford's was not only a strictly theoretical nor a religious form of opposition to vivisection. Underlying the abovementioned arguments against vivisection seems to have been deep and painful empathy for the suffering of animals, which we see reflected in her vegetarian as well as her antivivisectionist texts. In Kingsford's recollections of hearing the cries of a vivisected dog for the first time, the acuteness of her unintellectualised distress is clear, preceding and overshadowing other concerns about thwarted justice or corrupted science. She reflected:

> Much as I had heard and said, and even written, before that day about vivisection, I found myself then for the first time in its actual presence, and there swept over me a wave of such extreme mental anguish that my heart stood still under it. It was not sorrow, nor was it indignation merely, that I felt; it was nearer despair than these.[75]

Neither, if we afford any credence to her own and Maitland's testimony, was her ostentatious activism merely a form of performative moralism or a veiled attempt at psychological catharsis. Her attempts to save animals in day-to-day life, ruefully recounted by companions, render this explanation unlikely. In one characteristic incident, she was once attacked in the streets of Rome after rushing from her carriage to forcibly prevent a man from abusing his dog.[76]

Returning to French's depiction of antivivisectionists, including Kingsford, as being more focused on being seen than on achieving their professed goals, it appears that such an assessment underplays her deeply held love and concern for animals. French's portrayal absents the animal from his analysis. It indicates an underlying assumption that the spectacle of living and often un-anaesthetised or under-anaesthetised animals being operated on, in procedures that could include burning, amputation, eye gouging and disembowelment, could not in itself be sufficient motivation for opposition. Similarly, Coral Lansbury's suggestion that Kingsford's dramatic gesture stemmed from a quasi-sexual wish for 'vicarious immolation' disregards the likelihood of authentic distress at the reality of a suffering animal.[77]

---

74 Quoted in *Zoophilist*, 1 May 1885, 1; Turner, *Reckoning*, 95. Kean provides a more thorough refutation of the anti-science assessment in 'The "Smooth Cool Men of Science"', 22.

75 Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, vol. 1, 75.

76 Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, vol. 2, 308.

77 Lansbury, *Old Brown Dog*, 127.

As Greg Murrie has argued, this kind of explanation operates on the erroneous assumption that humanitarian feeling must always constitute 'a symptom of an anthropocentric projection of human concerns'.[78] To understand Kingsford's commitment to animal protection, theoretical explanations or references to other concerns—for example, the identification as a woman with oppressed animals—are helpful but incomplete. Rationales focusing on displaced guilt, psychological idiosyncrasies and women's anxieties about invasive gynaecological practices may contribute to the picture of her antivivisectionism and vegetarianism but should not eclipse an acknowledgement that she cared deeply for animals in themselves, hated to see or hear them suffering and considered their abuse to be profoundly wrong.

Feminism and Animal Protectionism

Kingsford was committed to women's emancipation from a young age. Her father's determination to share his inheritance equally with his sons and daughters and her husband's willingness to give his wife complete independence meant Kingsford was able to live an unconventionally free life, but she was nevertheless keenly aware of the injustices faced by women in her society. She sometimes wrote under a male pseudonym because, as she explained in a letter, 'Much, you know, is permitted to men which to women is forbidden'.[79] As a young woman she campaigned against the discriminatory marriage laws that passed ownership of a woman's belongings to her husband. Later in her life, as was common for women advocating for animals in this period, Kingsford was accused of being overly and skewedly sentimental and, despite her medical qualifications, unable to understand science.[80]

In 1868 Kingsford published her 'Essay on the admission of women to the parliamentary franchise', in which she articulated her case for women's suffrage and commended the work of the National Society for Women's Suffrage. Kingsford appealed both to the benefits gained for society by women's emancipation and to the demands of natural justice. Kingsford

78 Greg Murrie, '"Death-in-life": Curare, restrictionism and abolitionism in Victorian and Edwardian anti-vivisectionist thought', in *Animal Death*, ed. Jay Johnston and Fiona Probyn-Rapsey (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2013), 268.

79 Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, vol. 1, 27.

80 See, for example, 'Vivisection', *Nature* 25, no. 645 (1882): 430.

eventually grew disenchanted with what she saw as the mainstream women's movement's depreciation of natural womanhood, but her commitment to women's rights, including the right to vote, remained unequivocal throughout her life.[81]

Kingsford's distinctive understanding of gender relations was rooted in personal spiritual experience and Theosophist teaching. Like other Theosophists, Kingsford rejected Christian doctrine, which demeaned women and prohibited them from leadership positions. She believed that the conventional interpretation of the story of Adam and Eve incorrectly blamed Eve and her sex for humanity's 'fall'. Instead, the metaphorical figure of Adam fell because of the suppression within himself of the force of woman, which represented the intuition of God.[82] As the 'Mother of the Living', Eve embodied morality and intuition, while Adam embodied intellect. The subjection of intuition to intellect, and of femininity to masculinity, was the cause of 'all Manner of Evil and Confusion' in modern society. Therefore, the world could only be redeemed when women, who were 'nearest of all to God' were exalted and restored to their rightful place at 'the Throne of God'.[83]

This belief in women's sacredness went beyond academic hermeneutics. She recounted ecstatic visions in which she claimed to see the female nature of God:

> I see Thee now as Woman. Maria is next beside Thee. Thou art Maria. Maria is God. Oh Maria! God as Woman! Oh Maria! God as Woman! Thee, Thee I adore! Maria Aphrodite! Mother! Mother-God![84]

In another illumination recorded by Maitland, she described women as the 'crown and perfection of humanity' and the 'highest step in the ladder of incarnation'.[85] This conceptualisation of femininity is integral for understanding Kingsford's feminism and its interaction with animal protectionism. Women were at the very least as important and valuable as men, but they were crucially not the same. They certainly did not belong in the disempowered roles Victorian society assigned them, as 'the servants and pleasure providers of the masculine sex', but they did hold

81 Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, vol. 1, 19.
82 Kingsford and Maitland, *Finding of Christ*, 210–11.
83 Kingsford and Maitland, *Clothed with the Sun*, 53, 68, 85.
84 Kingsford and Maitland, *Clothed with the Sun*, 82.
85 Kingsford and Maitland, *Clothed with the Sun*, 242.

certain inherent qualities and capacities they were destined to fulfil.[86] To some extent, this configuration is a variation on the mainstream Victorian ideology of gender complementarity, which upheld the woman as the nurturing and domestic helpmate to the rational, dominant man, and which figured women as receptive, passive and inferior.[87] However, in Kingsford's view, women's innate 'Graces' made them fit for power, education and world transformation.[88] Their emancipation would, she believed, engender moral progress, freedom for animals and, eventually, spiritual salvation.

What was the relationship between Kingsford's feminist beliefs and her animal protectionism? Part of the answer lies in her identification of women's suffering with that of non-human animals. To some extent, Kingsford saw violence against animals as related to violence against women. She viewed vivisection on 'women and children—any who are unable to protect themselves', as the logical conclusion to the utilitarian defence of the practice on animals, although her aim appears to be to highlight moral hypocrisy rather than to warn of a likely outcome.[89] She also believed that the battles against animal abuse and women's oppression were necessarily intertwined: in her account of the utopian 'upward path' society must eventually follow, the exaltation of women brings about an inevitable outcry against 'the slaughter and torture of our animal brethren'.[90] Kingsford's foremost and inextricably intertwined goals were, as she announced to Maitland at their first meeting, 'justice as between men and women, human and animal'.[91] This is the kind of connection often stressed by historians of antivivisectionist and vegetarian women, and is an idea more recently explored by ecofeminists who assert a link born of shared oppression between women and non-human animals.[92] The case of the animals, the feminist and vegetarian newspaper *Shafts* announced in 1892, 'is the case of the woman'.[93]

86 Ninon [Anna] Kingsford, *An Essay on the Admission of Women to the Parliamentary Franchise* (London: Trubner & Co, 1868), 38.
87 Siv Ellen Kraft, 'Theosophy, gender and the "new woman"', in *Handbook of the Theosophical Current*, ed. Olav Hammer and Mikael Rothstein (Amsterdam: Brill, 2013), 357–58.
88 Anna Kingsford, *Lady's Own Paper*, 5 October 1872.
89 Anna Kingsford and Edward Maitland, 'The doctors and the antivivisection bill', *Examiner*, 17 June 1876.
90 Kingsford and Maitland, *Finding of Christ*, 211–12.
91 Hart, 'Biographical preface', 10.
92 See, for example, French, *Antivivisection and Medical Science*, 336; Lansbury, *Old Brown Dog*, 127; Adams, *Sexual Politics*, 13, 21.
93 *Shafts*, 19 November 1892.

However, Kingsford only occasionally drew a close connection between animal oppression and women's oppression, and almost never implicated her personal suffering or discriminatory experiences within these linkages. Kingsford was much more likely to connect animal suffering to human suffering in general. An evocative example of the tight association she perceived between animal and human abuse is conveyed in a dream she recounted to Maitland and that deeply influenced her antivivisectionism:

> I went in my sleep last night from one torture-chamber to another in the underground vaults of a vivisector's laboratory, and in all were men at work lacerating, dissecting, and burning the living flesh of their victims. But these were no longer mere horses or dogs or rabbits; for in each I saw a human shape … I saw the human shape within writhe and moan as if it were a babe in its mother's womb.[94]

Rather than focusing on womens and animals' common victimhood, Kingsford tended to emphasise the role of women as rescuers, protectors and carers for animals. If women were innately intuitive, emotional and moral, as Kingsford believed, then they were also well positioned and, indeed, morally bound to help vulnerable animals. She exhorted women not to participate in the ornamental use of feathers plucked from live birds on the basis that the ethics of the matter were 'so homely' and 'so important to women, who should be, above all things, merciful'.[95] While insisting that hunting was immoral for both sexes, she specified that women in particular should abhor the sport, because they were entrusted with 'censorship and sanction of morality' and 'direction of the male conscience'.[96] Other vegetarians and animal protectionists shared this idea that women's innate qualities made them ideally suited to the care of animals and especially the avoidance of meat. Food reformer May Yates told an international woman's conference that vegetarianism was the rational conclusion to 'a very proper and womanly conception' of women's responsibilities to animals, while the *Victorian Messenger's* 'Lady's Page' advised readers that abstinence from meat would render them 'more truly and wholly woman'.[97] Kingsford's essentialised ideas of femininity fed into

94 Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, vol. 1, 338.
95 Kingsford, *Perfect Way in Diet,* 111.
96 Kingsford, *Health, Beauty and the Toilet*, 142–43.
97 Quoted in Gregory, *Victorians and Vegetarians*, 164; *Women in Social Life: The Transactions of the Social Section of the International Congress of Women, London, July 1899* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1900), 250.

a discourse in which women were especially suited to, and responsible for, the care and protection of animals. In other words, women should care for animals, not necessarily because they were *like* animals, but because of what women were like.

Because Kingsford believed women were especially suited to care for animals, she held special contempt for those women who did not use their 'natural' feminine qualities to this purpose. For Kingsford, women who were complicit in animal abuse were not true women. They were imposters made monstrous or manly by their lack of concern for suffering animals: those who wore feathers in their hats were 'harpies' while willing female spectators at pigeon shootings were 'creatures with the forms and faces of women'.[98] She advised a reader in her 'letters to ladies' column that the cruelties of the seal skin trade should deter any 'good women' from wearing their furs.[99] Rather than identifying these women as victims of a common oppressive system, Kingsford denounced them as oppressors of animals, deeming them especially heinous because they acted in defiance of their natural feminine duties.

Kingsford, with her dramatic proposals to take the place of animals destined for vivisection, has been portrayed by some scholars as the extreme example of the antivivisectionist woman who projected her own pain or even, in Lansbury's account, sexual frustration, onto vivisected animals. Certainly, many antivivisectionist and vegetarian women did draw explicit and personal parallels between the oppression of their own sex and the violence against animals, including Isabella Ford and Constance Lytton.[100] However, explanations that reduce Kingsford's animal protectionism, and that of other women, to a frenzied identification of her female experience with suffering animals overlook key aspects of her thinking and risk uncritically reproducing the prejudiced critiques of vivisection's defenders. Kingsford was a woman who, after all, frequently announced her preference for animals over humans.[101] She was more likely to cast women, with the innately moral and intuitive qualities she assigned to them, as the potential saviours of animals than as their fellow victims. Animals, whether viewed through an antivivisectionist or vegetarian lens,

98 Kingsford, 'Aspects of the vegetarian question', in *Addresses and Essays*, 138; Kingsford, *Perfect Way in Diet*, 113.
99 Kingsford, *Health, Beauty and the Toilet*, 16.
100 Isabella Ford, *Women and Socialism* (London: International Labour Party, 1907), 11; Constance Lytton, *Prisons and Prisoners: Some Personal Experiences* (London: William Heinemann, 1914), 12–14.
101 Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, vol. 1, 46.

mattered to Kingsford in their own right, and her abhorrence of their slaughter and torture was far from a straightforward projection of female anxieties about a system that also hurt women.

Conclusion

To the mainstream press of her day, Kingsford's ideas were risible and her qualifications suspect. She was pilloried in poetry and prose for what appeared to be extreme and eccentric views and behaviours.[102] Within the vegetarian community, on the other hand, her impact in life and death was more profound. Charles Forward included Kingsford in his 1898 *A History of the Vegetarian Movement*, observing that she demonstrated 'what personal influence will do to advance a cause'.[103] Her writings are known to have influenced, among others, Henry Salt, Edward Maitland, American pacifist Agnes Ryan and a young Mahatma Gandhi. She prefigured and likely helped to inspire the significant proportion of vegetarian suffragettes in the suffrage campaigns of the early twentieth century.[104]

Almost none of her allies universally supported her radical views: an international antivivisectionist committee once expelled Kingsford and Maitland from their ranks after clashes over the issue of women's emancipation, while Salt called Kingsford a 'distinguished and memorable figure' whose unfortunate 'mystic doctrines and revelations' should be charitably overlooked.[105] Nevertheless, after her death she was widely acknowledged for her advocacy of a crucial connection between abstinence from meat and other personal, societal and religious developments. In its account of a memorial held for Kingsford two years after her death, the *Vegetarian* praised Kingsford's advocacy for demonstrating that 'purity of diet is … the open door to intellectual, physical, and spiritual development'.[106]

102 See, for example, *The World*, 5 March 1888; 'The vegetable boot', *Fun* 35, no. 894 (28 June 1882).
103 Forward, *Fifty Years of Food Reform*, 122.
104 See Leneman, 'The awakened instinct'.
105 Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, vol. 2, 7; Henry Salt, 'Anna Kingsford', *Vegetarian Review*, February 1896.
106 'The Kingsford commemoration', *Vegetarian*, 1 March 1890.

Kingsford's concepts of gender and the non-human animal were closely intertwined. However, she believed that her vegetarianism and the respect for animals that it entailed lay at the foundation of all other progressive movements, including those for which she also strongly advocated. In the first and most important place, Kingsford's wholehearted commitment to the sacred, scientific and moral imperative to protect animals meant refraining from eating them. It also found its extension in opposing vivisection. Kingsford's opposition to this practice was part of a wider humanitarian hostility towards animal exploitation and suffering, which had vegetarianism at its core. She also believed in a concept of divine womanhood that ought to be elevated in the pursuit of moral, social and spiritual progress. Within this feminine paradigm, women were ideal caretakers for vulnerable animals: they bore particular responsibility for animal care and additional censure in cases of animal abuse.

Kingsford's beliefs and advocacy, with their basis in a transformative vegetarianism intersecting with essentialised but subversive ideas of gender, are evidently not representative of most or all of her animal protectionist contemporaries. Nevertheless, analysing Kingsford's life and ideas in this way is a step towards a more nuanced understanding of the often overlooked Victorian vegetarian movement and its diverse adherents, whose objections to the exploitation of non-human animals were not reducible only to second-hand expressions of other ideas and fears.

ESSAYS

What does it mean to do feminism in 2022?

Activism and Erasure, Preservation and Transmission

Sharon Crozier-De Rosa
University of Wollongong

Immediately after news of the defeat of the Liberal–National coalition government in Australia in May 2022, commentators reflected on the Liberal Party's failure to engage with, and represent the interests of, women. Former deputy leader Julie Bishop reported that many Liberal women had told her that they did not feel that the Scott Morrison–led government had any empathy with women. 'Grace Tame and Brittany Higgins changed the narrative', she said. 'Women were saying [parliament] was not a safe place to work'.[1]

On the other side of the divide, in his victory speech, incoming prime minister, Anthony Albanese, shone a spotlight on women. 'Together', he said, 'we can make full and equal opportunity for women a national economic and social priority'. He also acknowledged Australia's next minister for Indigenous Australians, Linda Burney, who was present on the night.[2] Burney was the first Indigenous woman to be elected into the House of Representatives in July 2016.

Independent candidate Zoe Daniel cited a historic precedent in her victory speech. Securing the seat of Goldstein in Victoria, she recalled how early twentieth-century suffragist Vida Goldstein, after whom the electorate was named, ran as an Independent numerous times, but unsuccessfully. As a Senate candidate in 1903, Goldstein was one of the first women in the British Empire to stand for election to a national parliament. 'This seat is in her name', Daniel said, 'and today I take her rightful place'.[3]

1 Amanda Meade, 'Senior Liberals say party must address women problem and regain centre after election loss', *Guardian*, 22 May 2022, theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/may/22/senior-liberals-say-party-must-address-women-problem-and-regain-centre-after-election-loss.

2 Anthony Albanese, 'IN FULL: Anthony Albanese delivers victory speech after clinching win over Coalition', *ABC News*, 21 May 2022, youtube.com/watch?v=77N_cxPJvkE&ab_channel=ABCNews%28Australia%29.

3 Zoe Daniel, 'Independent Zoe Daniel defeats Liberal Tim Wilson in Goldstein', *ABC News*, 21 May 2022, www.youtube.com/watch?v=qvEDcej5tYc&ab_channel=ABCNews%28Australia%29.

What all of this pointed to was the highly uneven terrain on which gender issues and activists operated in Australia in 2022. On the one hand, there was childhood sexual abuse, sexual assault in parliament and an unresponsive, even complicit government.[4] On the other, there was mass feminist rallying, pioneering Indigenous women, historical connections and an incoming government at least pledging to take women's interests and needs seriously.[5]

While this was the national backdrop, the international scene was similarly uneven, in some cases much bleaker. Take the United States. A notoriously misogynistic Republican president, Donald Trump, was defeated by Democrat Joe Biden in 2020. From May 2022, though, people looked on anxiously as it seemed increasingly likely that the Supreme Court—now with a majority of conservative members—was about to strike down the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* judgement in the case of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*. This spurred outpourings of solidarity and activism, including more than 380 pro-abortion rallies staged across the country on 14 May 2022. However, these were not enough to prevent the Supreme Court from announcing on 24 June its decision to overturn the Roe judgement, thereby removing the protection previously afforded to women who chose to undergo an abortion and allowing individual states to legislate on abortion. Almost immediately, abortion clinics began closing, while 13 states had so-called trigger laws in place that would see abortion banned within 30 days.[6]

In the face of ongoing threats to and erosion of women's rights, feminist activism continues. Yet, as Angela McRobbie and others have argued, there has long been a problem with ensuring the intergenerational transmission of feminist knowledge.[7] Publicly, feminist struggles and feminist achievements have long been 'caricatured and trivialised, if not forgotten', while finding funding to preserve and make available feminist

4 Georgia Hitch, 'Review finds 1 in 3 staff in federal parliament experience sexual harassment', *ABC News*, 30 November 2021, www.abc.net.au/news/2021-11-30/sexual-haassment-report-parliament-brittany-higgins/100660894.

5 While it is still early days in Albanese's tenure as prime minister, a record 10 women were sworn into his cabinet. Gay Alcorn, 'Editorial: A diverse cabinet that better reflects our nation', *Age*, 1 June 2022, theage.com.au/politics/federal/a-diverse-cabinet-that-better-reflects-our-nation-20220601-p5aq6g.html.

6 Jia Tolentino, 'We're not going back to the time before Roe. We're going somewhere worse', *New Yorker*, 24 June 2022, newyorker.com/magazine/2022/07/04/we-are-not-going-back-to-the-time-before-roe-we-are-going-somewhere-worse.

7 Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (London: Sage, 2009), 26.

histories has been difficult.[8] This means that these histories have not always had the ready ability to inspire future generations of feminists, many of whom feel they are inventing feminism anew instead of building on an ongoing movement. Given the moment that we are in, however, I feel that this is set to change—*with* our continued work—and in the face of real and attempted retrogression.

Digital technologies are key to this feeling of imminent change. As soon as the 2017 Women's March—a global phenomenon involving 5 million people and 673 events—was over, the organisation immediately set about preserving its history and making it accessible via digital platforms, including its own website.[9] In subsequent years, the movement marched again, commemorating its initial mobilisation while also diversifying its protests, like those against curtailing reproductive freedoms. Its website captures its histories. Each group of marchers, wherever they are positioned globally, as long as they have internet access, can be informed about feminism's evolving histories. They can be jointly informed and inspired.

Of course, as with feminism itself, this is not without its complexities and issues. As Vera Mackie and I argue in a recent article, making the histories of diverse groups of women available and known has significant consequences for who feels invited and welcomed into feminist movements.[10] As the initial Women's March demonstrated, failing to incorporate the histories of women of colour into the memory cultures that activists were constructing around the movement ostracised groups of women that might otherwise have participated in it.[11] The organisation

8 McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism*, 49; Sharon Crozier-De Rosa and Vera Mackie, *Remembering Women's Activism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 22–24.

9 See *Women's March*, womensmarch.com/; and 'Women's March on Washington Archive', *George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida*, ufdc.ufl.edu/collections/womensmarch.

10 Vera Mackie and Sharon Crozier-De Rosa, 'Rallying women: Activism, archives and affect', *Women's History Review* (published online 11 July 2022), doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2022.2090711. The article is part of a special forum in the journal, edited by Sharon Crozier-De Rosa and Vera Mackie. See Crozier-De Rosa and Mackie, 'Mobilising affect and trauma: The politics of gendered memory and gendered silence', *Women's History Review* (published online 26 June 2022), doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2022.2090705.

11 For example, cultural critic and writer Jamilah Lemieux declared that she refused to 'feign solidarity' with White women who had initially appropriated the name of a historical Black protest when they called their proposed rally, the Million Woman March, without acknowledging Black history (in this case, the 1995 Million Man March and the 1997 Million Woman March organised by Minister Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam). Jamilah Lemieux, 'Why I'm skipping the Women's March on Washington', *Colorlines*, 17 January 2017, colorlines.com/articles/why-im-skipping-womens-march-washington-op-ed.

immediately reflected and self-corrected. It changed its name, invited a more diverse group of co-chairs, and, on its website, replaced its initial 'mission' with a more inclusive one.

While self-correction was laudable, what the movement did, in effect, was to digitally erase evidence of its controversial history. This has consequences for future generations seeking to know the history of early twenty-first century feminist movements. What remains on the organisation's website is, arguably, a static and sanitised account of its history. This raises new challenges for us, including working to ensure that feminist history as a terrain encompassing solidarity and dissent, inclusion and exclusion, is captured and transmitted to future generations. Surely it is not a story of homogenous, unproblematic progress that has the capacity to inspire future feminists and inform them about the difficulties of achieving feminist reform, but rather that of a dynamic movement that has been complex, contentious, reflective and responsive.

For me then, thinking about 'doing' feminism in 2022 is both backward- and forward-looking, drawing on the physical and the digital. A tweet that appeared at the outset of the current global Covid-19 pandemic (referring to the United States' gender pay gap) stated: 'This quarantine is affecting everyone in the workforce, but it especially sucks for men. We're losing $1 for every $.79 women are losing'.[12] This was humour and pathos in a sea of historical continuities and regressions, wins and losses.

Feminists are still participating in the long fight for equal pay, equal representation, protection from sexual assault, violence and against patriarchy. In 2018, Ireland recorded a historic turn of the tide that has paved the way for abortion reform (via the removal of the 1982 constitutional clause that made the right to life of the 'unborn' and the pregnant woman equal).[13] In 2022, pro-abortion activists in Ireland warned feminists that 'the Dobbs case serves as a powerful reminder to us here in Ireland, and across the world, that we can never take progress on women's rights for granted'.[14] At the same time, feminists continue to make history. Activists in Argentina and Colombia have successfully

12 See twitter.com/_ryankirk/status/1241076154934726657, posted 21 March 2020.

13 Ivana Bacik, 'Ireland has changed utterly: The cruel Eighth Amendment is history', *Guardian*, 26 May 2018, theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/may/26/ireland-has-changed-utterly-the-cruel-eighth-amendment-is-history.

14 Ivana Bacik, 'As US abortion rights take a shocking step backwards, we must move forward', *Irish Examiner*, 25 June 2022, irishexaminer.com/opinion/commentanalysis/arid-40903439.html.

campaigned to decriminalise abortion.[15] Women demand and enact physical visibility through campaigning for monuments to their pasts and marching on the streets. They use social media to mobilise, connecting with feminists globally, while retaining and making accessible a digital archive of their activisms.

I recently undertook research for a media outlet for a television advertisement on gender equality. My remit was to provide a report on 30 or more key moments—achievements and setbacks—in the campaign for gender equality in Australia. While this 'stocktake' reminded me that, yes, faith in a Whiggish notion of progress is naïve, I was simultaneously confronted by the knowledge that, due to feminist campaigning, we have come a long way. As a historian of feminist activism, doing feminism in 2022 means working to render the histories of these campaigns visible and accessible so that aspiring feminists can be inspired. It also means including the ugly, the confrontational and the setbacks, with the joy, the spectacle and the solidarity, to produce future feminists who are informed. The more they know of the historical nature of the struggle they're signing up for, the more likely they are to be prepared, mindful of being inclusive and ultimately successful.

15 Frances Solá-Santiago, 'What the green scarf means in the fight for reproductive rights', *Refinery29*, 17 May 2022, www.refinery29.com/en-us/2022/05/10978997/green-scarf-meaning-roe-v-wade-protests.

The Work of Feminist History

Ann Curthoys
The Australian National University

Doing feminism is always hard work. It takes a lot of thought and then the work of translating that thinking into action, and then reflecting on the action and so more thought. It's been part of my life now for over half a century. My main commitment to feminism these days is through the histories I research and write, and through supporting feminist historical work generally including through providing historical information and financial support for feminist documentary film.

If I think about how feminist theories and approaches influence my historical work, the first concept that leaps to mind is 'intersectionality', the awareness of the ways in which class, race, gender and sexuality constitute, influence, shape and disrupt one another. My second thought is that as feminist historians we generally do two distinct but related things. We historicise gender relations in all their complexity and fluidity, involving changing and multiple masculine and feminine identities and gendered social structures and processes and we ask, whatever topic we do, however focused on men's ideas and actions it may seem, what were the women doing and thinking?

In 2022, as the pandemic continues, I am working on several projects and each one has thrown up its own challenges in terms of intersectionality, gender relations and researching women. The first project is completing a book I have been working on with two other historians, Shino Konishi and Alex Ludewig, for several years.[1] Shino and Alex had been working for some time on a biographical history of Rottnest Island, an island off the coast of Western Australia, near Perth, and in 2017 invited me to join their project. They had chosen the people whose biographies would make up the book, people such as Vlamingh, the Dutch maritime explorer who, while searching for a lost ship visited the island in 1696, and Lady Mary Anne Broome, who as a governor's wife stayed on the island for

1 Ann Curthoys, Shino Konishi and Alexandra Ludewig, *The Lives and Legacies of a Carceral Island: A Biographical History of Wadjemup/Rottnest Island* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022).

several summers in the early 1880s and wrote about it extensively. Other figures who encountered the island included Karl Lehmann and Martin Trojan, two German civilians detained on Rottnest for a year during World War I; Herman Kuring, an Australian of German descent who was superintendent of the military establishment on the island during World War II; and Fay Sullivan, the island's first nurse who became the manager's wife and who, over several post-war decades, helped transform the island into a much-loved holiday island and tourist attraction. Shino and Alex also planned chapters on people associated with the Aboriginal prison on the island during the nineteenth century, and that's where I came in. Would I write the chapter on Henry Vincent, the brutal superintendent from 1839 to 1866? A little later, would I help write a chapter on some of the prisoners? Being thoroughly immersed in Western Australian history by this time, I was very happy to join them.

Writing about a negative figure like Henry Vincent and about the Aboriginal men who suffered under his regime has been a challenge, not only to me as a historian but also specifically as a feminist historian. I decided to look not only at Henry but also at his wife, Louisa Vincent, who acted as matron on the island, and to some extent at their children. Writing about the Aboriginal male prisoners was a different kind of challenge, so sparse and one sided is the available material, but there, too, I encountered stories involving the women in their lives and communities. We also wrote a chapter on one of the two non-Aboriginal women incarcerated on the island, Jane Green, a teenage girl who had arrived in the colony from England as a child indentured servant and who then subsequently was charged with the murder of her newborn baby, fathered by her employer.

While the Wadjemup/Rottnest Island project is now finished, and the book soon to be published by Routledge, the same cannot yet be said of the second of my three projects, the history of domestic violence in Australia. This is an Australian Research Council funded project, led by Cath Kevin along with Zora Simic and myself. We have done a lot of thinking and writing historiographical and other essays on the topic and are now in the thick of research. What a big topic this is! For historians used to emphasising historical change, we keep being struck by the similarities between now and the situation of women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (our project goes from 1850 to 2020). And yet, of course, there are social and cultural changes crucial to our understanding of domestic violence and its history. This is a quintessentially feminist

historical project, concerned as it is with intimate personal relations, women's experience, government policies, grass roots activism, the justice system and public attitudes.

There are some unexpected connections between the domestic violence project and the Wadjemup/Rottnest Island project that have been illuminating. While working on the lives of Henry and Louisa Vincent, I read Penelope Hetherington's account of Louisa's petition in 1869 for judicial separation on the grounds of cruelty and began to research it further. The man who was known for his cruelty to Aboriginal prisoners was also cruel to his wife of many years, a connection between public and private abuse that commentators often draw when discussing acts of terrorism in the present. Henry Vincent's violence was both physical and verbal, exhibiting behaviour we might now describe as coercive control. I am now investigating domestic violence in nineteenth-century Western Australia in more depth, through court records, newspapers (i.e. blessed *Trove*) and contemporary fiction.

And then there is my third project, a sole authored book on the visit to Australia and New Zealand in 1960 of African American singer, actor and activist, Paul Robeson, and his journalist wife, Eslanda Robeson. My original motivation in working on this project was to explore the connections between the Cold War experience in Australia and the rise of a politics concerned with Aboriginal rights. Embedded both in the Cold War and in an emerging Aboriginal rights movement, 1960 is an excellent year to look at these complex relationships. Furthermore, the Robesons' visit is an opportunity to write some slice history, looking closely at Australia and New Zealand for two months in 1960. I started work on it in 2008, so long ago, wrote one essay on Paul Robeson's visit and Aboriginal politics in 2010, gave several papers on Eslanda Robeson in 2011 and then had to set the project aside. I returned to it in 2017 and have been working on it during the pandemic and hope to finish it by the end of the year. This is in many ways a fun project, taking me into many pathways in cultural history, investigating music, film, theatre, television, writing and painting. As a feminist historian, I have chosen to pay Eslanda a lot of attention too, for though she was much less famous than Paul, she was an interesting figure: an anthropologist who had undertaken her doctoral research in Africa, a journalist accredited to the United Nations and Paul's manager. When she spoke to women's groups and was interviewed on radio and in the press, her comments about questions of race and gender were often incisive and insightful.

Writing history, then, of any kind, is hard work. For me, it is very enjoyable work. When the state of the world gets deeply depressing, as it so often does, I can burrow into my research and writing and just hope that somehow, some time, it will make a difference.

Reproductive Rights Denied and Delayed

Catherine Kevin
Flinders University

2022 has been a year of reckoning for feminist abortion politics. Here in South Australia (SA), the jubilation we felt after legislation decriminalising abortion was finally passed in March 2021 had well and truly worn off when the new year came, and then a new government was elected and still the new law was not in place.

The South Australian abortion action coalition (*saaac*) was formed in 2015 with the purpose of improving access to abortion healthcare primarily, but not exclusively, by campaigning for decriminalisation. In June 2022, despite the success of this campaign, the Pregnancy Advisory Centre, SA's main abortion provider, was sending people needing abortions after 22 weeks pregnancy to Darwin to avoid prosecution for breaching the hard upper limit that had been removed, but only in theory at this point. Those living in rural and remote areas were still often forced to undertake unnecessary and costly journeys—sometimes traveling epic distances across this vast state—to access medical abortion care that was available by telehealth to people in other parts of the country.

Covid-19 amplified the problems with SA's 50-year-old abortion law. The 1969 legislation was an amendment to the criminal code that was proving tired and incompetent in the face of improved medical technologies that enabled self-managed abortions at home in every other state. Here in SA, patients were forced to leave lockdown and expose themselves and their abortion healthcare workers to unnecessary risk of infection just to cross the threshold of a hospital twice, with an interval of 24 to 48 hours, to be given the two pills required for a medical abortion. All this because our 1969 legislation required all abortions be performed in a 'prescribed hospital'.

Despite the sense of urgency to protect South Australians from Covid-19 in the first two years of the pandemic, the health and safety of abortion patients was a peripheral concern. On the eve of the 2020 lockdown, the attorney general and her staff were drafting a Bill to decriminalise abortion. When the Emergency Management Act 2004 (SA) was invoked to deal with the pandemic, this drafting work was halted. The police commissioner and the chief medical officer became the authorities and public faces of Covid-19 management in accordance with the Act, while the premier was a mere background figure whose main role was to pronounce his support for their decisions.

Almost immediately, *saaac*'s focus shifted from decriminalisation to lobbying the chief medical officer to use her powers defined by the Act to advise the police commissioner to suspend the aspects of SA's abortion law that made those needing abortions unnecessarily and disproportionately vulnerable during the pandemic. We identified and lobbied on the basis of two issues. The first was the impact of lockdown on sexual activity, with or without consent, and the anticipated increase in unwanted pregnancies and need for abortion and possible obstructions to access. The second issue was infection exposure, which was especially relevant to those with compromised immunity. With a move to telehealth for GP services across the country, people seeking abortions in all jurisdictions outside of SA were able to access early medical abortion via telephone or online consultations at home and postal delivery of medication. In SA this was not lawful. Despite an intense campaign from April 2020, there was no temporary change to abortion law to protect patients and abortion providers during a period of heightened need for abortion care services and heightened risk of disease.

When the SA lockdown was lifted politicians resumed some of their pre-lockdown projects and abortion legislation was tabled in parliament. In the first instance Greens MLC Tammy Franks presented a Bill to legislate for 150-metre, safe access zones around abortion services. After some debate about the right to silent prayer in the vicinity of services, the Bill passed both houses in November 2020 and was implemented within weeks. Buoyed by this, *saaac* intensified its focus on decriminalisation and, by March, both houses had passed the Termination of Pregnancy Act 2021 (SA), thus removing abortion from criminal law and lifting barriers to access … in theory at least. This felt like a feminist victory, and it was.

However, by the end of 2021 the regulations required for the new law to take effect were still not finalised. For reasons that were not made public, the work required for the enactment of the law was not prioritised. As the Omicron variant of Covid-19 took hold after the borders were gradually opened between November 2021 and January 2022, the concerns that had energised *saaac* during the lockdown in 2020 were with us again. We had a new abortion law but in mid-May 2022, when the number of cases recorded in one day hit a record high of 7,165, a significant majority of abortion patients outside of Adelaide were still beset by unnecessary travel requirements that diminished their privacy, increased their costs and forced a greater risk of exposure to disease. At this point, much of Australia became captivated by the news that a draft decision of the Supreme Court of the United States on the future of *Roe v. Wade* had been leaked. Six weeks later, on 24 June, the landmark ruling that had secured the right to abortion on the constitutional grounds of the right to privacy was overturned.

As the *Roe v. Wade* news sunk in, expressions of solidarity spread across Australia and elsewhere. In Adelaide, 5,000 people marched down King William Street on 1 July, a cold Friday night. Within a week, the SA legislation that had passed 16 months earlier finally came into effect on 7 July. However, in the short week between 1 and 7 July, Australian anti-abortion forces—long buttressed by their overseas counterparts and focused on South Australia—reinvigorated their efforts against abortion rights. On Saturday 2 July, David Speirs MP, the new leader of the opposition Liberal Party, was due to attend a training day for emerging anti-abortion leaders as a mentor. The publicity for this event may well have been the reason for him withdrawing at the last minute. It also revealed that SA parliamentarians from both major parties were actively involved in this group, calling itself Enid Lyons List.

Central themes in the 2022 *Roe v. Wade* story are geography and privacy. Where geography is an issue, so too is cost. Almost at the moment when the final legal victory of *saaac* and its supporters was won, the US Supreme Court decision reminded us that the story of state-by-state decriminalisation in Australia since 2002 and the victories for increased legal access in countries like Ireland, Argentina and Thailand since 2020, do not reflect a natural global trajectory towards reproductive justice, a fact that historians hardly need reminding of. But as geographical inequities leading to reduced privacy and an unfair cost burden were finally being addressed by SA law, a changed interpretation of the constitutional right

to privacy and the geographical inequities it exacerbates was causing heartache in the US, especially in the 13 states where Roe's reversal prompted trigger laws that effectively ban abortion. And while SA's premier and deputy premier provided public reassurances that there was no plan to reopen the abortion debate here, the swift response of SA-based anti-abortion activists, including powerful MPs, to the *Roe v. Wade* furore reminded us that lives connect across the globe and doing feminism involves tenacity and vigilance.

Pandemic Pandora

Ann McGrath
The Australian National University

In Greek mythology, Pandora is the first human female. Her name means 'all-gifted' or 'all-endowed'. In popular tellings, the god Zeus gave her a container as a wedding present and, curious, she opened it. All the human vices escaped, plus other horrid things, including diseases. The germs of pandemics, those diseases that spread through the whole world, exposing human frailty, also escaped. Remaining tightly inside that vessel, however, was the last remaining human attribute, Hope.

As this journal is called *Lilith*, and as my first ever publication was in the feminist journal *Hecate*, I have been prompted to reflect upon the journal editors' deployment of powerful female icons. These figures, whose stories circulated in the northern hemisphere cultures of the Middle East and Europe, were likely selected to fire feminists with *attitude*, a much needed attribute when negotiating the hallowed halls of history, routinely bedecked with representations of the 'great (male) thinkers'.

Accounts of sassy, super-powered women also feature in Indigenous storytelling traditions around the globe. Australian Aboriginal women have a trove of powerful figures to draw upon. Epic narratives, such as those about the Seven Sisters, are becoming more widely known through women's storytelling, art, dance and museum exhibitions. Might these epic stories be considered revealing of 'Histories' too?

Working with various communities, we are exploring such questions through the Australian Research Council (ARC) Laureate program *Rediscovering the Deep Human Past: Global Networks, Future Opportunities*. Indigenous modes of historical practice address the deep past, not only in a chronological sense of a time span encompassing their long histories, but they also challenge historical periodisation per se. For they take place on their sovereign lands, their Country, in a multilayered temporality translated as the 'everywhen'.[1]

1 For a full discussion of this concept, see Ann McGrath, Laura Rademaker and Jakelin Troy, ed., *Everywhen: Australia and the Language of Deep History* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2023).

The 2019–22 pandemic years have thwarted our ARC Laureate program's goal of running workshops with young Indigenous women in remote communities. Nonetheless, we have offered several early career researcher workshops, in-person and in-pandemic, alongside many stimulating Zoom seminars, panels and talks.[2]

Via a multi-city hook-up, I was also delighted to be reunited with the co-authors of the feminist history *Creating a Nation*, published in 1994.[3] As a young scholar, when Pat Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake and Marian Quartly invited me to write with them, I recall my heart pounding with excitement for days. This was an opportunity to work alongside my feminist history heroines. Our recent gathering was orchestrated by Anna Clark, who wrote about our book in *Making Australian History* (2022). She also noted the significance of Australia's deep history as a framing device—that is, the long history that took place before Europeans arrived. Clark's book hopefully marks the end of an era in which feminist histories were not considered 'general histories'. Possibly feminist historians are 'lonesome no more'?[4] In the history profession, I certainly take joy in seeing many younger women rising up the ranks through merit, and in several taking on important leadership roles within and outside the university system.

Regardless of the pleasures of Zoom, however, nothing beats developing your own in-person networks of determined women. Recently I had the opportunity to revisit the power of sisterhood in a 'meet-the-author' conversation with Wiradjuri author Anita Heiss, who was a student at UNSW when I was a lecturer there in the 1990s. As Anita explained in her candid memoir *Am I Black Enough for You? 10 Years On* (2022), learning more about the true story of Australian history meant much to her as a young student.[5] She pointed out the strength and drive of her amazing cohort, which included outstanding female role models such as Larissa Behrendt and Terri Janke.

---

2 See, for example, 'Training, education, and outreach', *Research Centre for Deep History*, re.anu.edu.au/training/; 'Workshop on Indigenous histories', *Research Centre for Deep History*, re.anu.edu.au/workshop-on-indigenous-histories; 'Deep time workshop', re.anu.edu.au/deep-time-workshop.

3 Pat Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake, Ann McGrath and Marian Quartly, *Creating a Nation* (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble, 1994).

4 Anna Clark, *Making Australian History* (North Sydney: Vintage, 2022); Ann McGrath, 'The loneliness of the feminist historian', *Australian Feminist Studies* 29, no. 80 (2014): 204–14.

5 Anita Heiss, *Am I Black Enough for You? 10 Years On* (Docklands: Vintage, 2022); 'Anita Heiss in conversation with Ann McGrath', *Research Centre for Deep History*, re.anu.edu.au/anita-heiss-in-conversation-with-ann-mc-grath.

A high achiever from my own generation, historian Jackie Huggins, has just published a new edition of her collected essays, *Sister Girl*: *Reflections on Tiddaism, Identity and Reconciliation*, which explores the sustaining value of her Indigenous female friends.[6] Not only has she supported many younger women, launching several of Anita's books, she is also an exemplary leader and advocate for Indigenous rights, emphasising the significance of historical redress, including Treaty and Truth-Telling. Currently an honorary professor and senior advisor to our Laureate program's digital map project, *Marking Country*, Jackie has much to share. On a recent visit to Kooramindanjie or Carnarvon Gorge with postdoctoral fellow Amy Way, we were able to witness a deep history of place not as something of 'the past' but as a present story of ongoing connection to Country. Jackie had invited her Uncle, elder Fred 'Cotto' Conway to lead our history lessons, which involved walking on and learning about their Country. Fleeing mission life, Cotto told us how he had worked on cattle stations, as a horse-breaker and in travelling shows, before dedicating 30 years to working on his Country as a ranger, sharing the knowledge he was building with people of all ages and backgrounds. This is Jackie's mother's Country, and we heard how her much of her family was ripped away from her beautiful Country and forced to live on the government-run reserve, Cherbourg. As expressed in her pathbreaking book *Auntie Rita* (1994), Jackie had great respect for her mother's wisdom.[7]

Feminist history means celebrating the lives of those who have taught us so much, some of whom have now left us. Like Mary Pappin, a Mutthi Mutthi woman who taught me how to think about deep time in the Australian interior. What an imprint she has left on my historical consciousness and my soul.[8] When I return to Lake Mungo, I expect to feel her welcoming presence and her critical eye.

Another strong woman I worked with much earlier—in the early 1980s—was Kathy Mills, a Kungarakany and Gurindji woman who has recently passed. She fought for justice, offering support and leadership

6 Jackie Huggins, *Sister Girl: Reflections on Tiddaism, Identity and Reeconciliation* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2022).

7 Jackie Huggins, Rita Huggins and Jane M. Jacobs, 'Kooramindanjie: Place and the Postcolonial', *History Workshop Journal* 39, no. 1 (1995): 164–81; Rita Huggins and Jackie Huggins, *Auntie Rita* (1994, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press: 2005). The *Marking Country* deep history map project will feature on the website of the Research Centre for Deep History, re.anu.edu.au.

8 Ann McGrath, 'An inspirational leader', *Research Centre for Deep History*, re.anu.edu.au/an-inspirational-leader-mary-june-tookie-kelly-pappin-mutthi-mutthi-elder.

for Aboriginal women and friendship to all. Her activism was practised through storytelling, poetry, song and through her love and support for family, friends and allies. She was proud of her fighting Irish heritage and of her family traditions of Indigenous activism and leadership. I first met Kathy at Bagot, the urban Aboriginal community in Darwin, in 1980. She and a couple of resident women, Joy White and Sheila Williams, who were both raised according to Indigenous laws and protocols, had started an action group to help Aboriginal women living in this urban setting.

At the first Women and Labour Conference in Sydney in 1978, it was notable that my paper—the first I ever gave at an academic conference—was one of the only ones discussing Aboriginal women's history. The second conference, held in Melbourne in 1980, had more Aboriginal participation and, I hoped, would provide an opportunity for Aboriginal women from the Northern Territory (NT) to speak in their own voices. This courageous trio wanted their issues to be heard. Tired of being ignored, they considered a women's conference an exciting idea. Choosing topics important to their lives, albeit far from the 'hot-button' feminist topics of the day, they prepared talks on household management, cultural rituals for girls and identity issues for those of mixed descent.

Having enjoyed a Western-style education, Kathy was the key cultural intermediary and senior woman. My role had been as fundraiser and facilitator but, in Melbourne, another role was required: translator/interpretor of an unfamiliar academic/feminist cultural world and of a big city. The white feminist movement was totally alien to all three panel members, but particularly so for Sheila and Joy: with the exception of the sacred turf of the Melbourne Cricket Ground (the iconic home of Australian Rules football), so too was the city of Melbourne. This white feminist world was 'My Country', in a way, and I was expected to fulfil hosting duties. I am not sure how well I performed. The women soon opted out of living in the arty group house in Carlton that I'd arranged for them. Instead, they packed up and moved to the outer suburbs, to the home of one of Kathy's older relatives, a senior, highly respected woman. Despite poor knowledge of Aussie Rules and exhausted from driving through traffic to the outer suburbs, I knew how well they would play the role of host in their own Country, so I did my best.

Kathy's paper was about being a 'yeller feller'. She wished not to be recognised as 'Aboriginal' nor as 'part-anything' but as having a plural identity based upon her ancestry. Malak Malak woman Sheila Williams

talked about women's budgeting and how the women of Bagot required training in order to pay bills and to support their families. Joy White, who had grown up in the remote Belyuen community, talked about their empowering and cherished coming-of- age ceremonies for girls. Joy opposed promised marriages but deeply valued special womanhood rituals.

When Aboriginal women and other participants in the urban, mainly scholarly audience, posed questions about male violence against women, Joy and Sheila became distinctly uncomfortable. They did not feel authorised to speak of incidents from other places, nor did they wish to speak of their own personal traumas. They wanted to stand by their men, they explained, for they suffered greatly due to colonialism.

Immediately after the panel, the weight of Joy's radical action—of sharing women's secret knowledge—made her extremely anxious, but when she went outside to be greeted by a big rainbow, she was relieved, for this was the sign that the elders had approved. All was good. Although disoriented by aspects of the unfamiliar culture around them, the three women were elated to be heard, to be listened to in this special way, by strangers, by highly educated Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants. We have caught up for some reunions since that special trip.

These women were always leaders. Decades later, Joy became an outspoken advocate for human rights, leading protests against the 2007 NT Intervention, and against the attack on Indigenous autonomy implicit in the 'welfare card'. Joy played an active role in the Bagot community, and cared for many children, being honoured with the title NT Mother of the Year in 2014 and, in 2017, shortlisted for Senior Australian of the Year. Sheila Williams moved away from Bagot and successfully maintained her own house, home and family intact in the suburbs. Courageous and strong, each made many contributions over the decades. None of this could have happened without Kathy. Kathy was the rock and remained a great role model. Amongst her above-mentioned accolades, she also gained the title of NT Senior of the Year, an Order of Australia and an Honorary Doctorate.[9]

9 Nicholas Hynes, 'Aboriginal elder Kathy Mills remembered as formidable leader and brilliant storyteller', *ABC News*, abc.net.au/news/2022-04-26/kathy-mills-indigenous-advocate-obituary/101012466.

Readers, let us honour women like these who speak out, and so bravely support the struggles of other women and their families. Women who organise, who build networks. Who stand up and who march when needed. You could fill in the dots for those people in your own life. And think of the networks that you yourself are yet to build and support.

These days, Hope may have lost its glitter: kidnapped, misappropriated, failing, frequently exhausted. Yet, we cannot give up on gaining strength from women of myth and history. And from our peers and elders, past and present. We cannot relinquish the Hope that we have shared.

Despite Pandora being blamed for letting out all those nasty human vices and viruses, for feminists, the gift of Hope—and specifically the hope that all women might gain equal power in our unequal societies—must be cherished. During the pandemic years, Pandora and other strong female figures have something profound to say to us all.

The Power of Memory for Feminism

Janet Ramsay
Jessie Street National Women's Library

Being a feminist and assessing the position of feminism in Australia in 2022 is a complex matter, recognising that feminism is now, as always, in a position of real and energetically engaged conflict. It is also a time when it is crucial to recognise the importance of memory in both the assessment and ongoing success of the feminist project.

Historians are the guardians of strategic memory, of course, and so are libraries and archives. Significant in that regard is the Jessie Street National Women's Library (JSNWL), established in Sydney in 1989 by Shirley Jones and Lenore Coltheart. They named it to honour and preserve the memory of Jessie Street (1889–1970), a tireless feminist worker for the rights of humanity at all levels of society in Australia and internationally, for peace and, in particular, for the rights of Indigenous Australians.[1] Shirley Jones, who passed away in 2021, worked for 20 years to establish and secure the library.

The JSNWL is a specialist library and archive collecting the published and unpublished materials—including personal archives, serials and posters—that document the lives, political activism and experiences of Australian women of all ethnic, racial, religious and class backgrounds. It is independently funded by members and supporters, staffed entirely by volunteers and located in the Ultimo Community Centre, Sydney, thanks to the City of Sydney Council. In 1993 the library was chosen to house the collections of the former Women's Archive (Canberra), which faced funding difficulties. The JSNWL is regularly used by historians and is often called upon to contribute to exhibitions. The skill of the volunteer librarians is demonstrated by use of the library by university librarianship courses for work experience and training for their students.

1 Lenore Coltheart, ed., *Jessie Street. A Revised Autobiography* (Sydney: Federation Press, 2004).

Recent years have been a time both of new hope and all too familiar disappointments for feminists. We have been inspired by brave women, including Rosie Batty, Grace Tame and Brittany Higgins, speaking out about the violence they have suffered and to support others; by the international stirring of the #Me Too movement; and by thrilling participation in the biggest street demonstrations of angry women we have seen for decades in the rallies held in 40 cities across Australia organised as the Women's March4Justice on 15 March 2021.

Meanwhile, and in an equally encouraging indication of Australian feminist activism, the Equal Rights Alliance (ERA), one of six women's alliances funded to inform the federal government about women's concerns, continues to represent 65 vigorous women's community organisations. The Jessie Street National Women's Library is a member organisation of ERA.

But while #Me Too brought international encouragement, developments across the world increasingly threaten hard won feminist achievement. Fears, now all too true, have arisen in the United States about the implications of the reversal of the abortion right determination of the *Roe v. Wade* case, while Republican states enact abortion restriction legislation. In Poland in October 2020 100,000 people marched against legislative measures to restrict abortion access.[2] In Afghanistan employment and educational opportunities for women and girls have been reversed with the return of the Taliban.[3] This poignant time in the international feminist struggle was dramatically demonstrated by the 2021 decision by the United Nations (UN), through UN Women, that changes in international politics made it too risky to continue the tradition of Women's World Conferences between 1975 (Mexico City) and 1995 (Beijing). Fearing that a further World Conference might see dilution of the Platform for Action agreed in Beijing, a less formal Generation Equity Forum was arranged. Despite pressure from conservative governments, strong action commitments were made, including on gender-based violence and feminist movements and leadership. Outcomes were harder fought at the 66th meeting of the UN Commission on the Status

2 Chelsea Matiash, 'The latest on abortion rights in the U.S.', *New York Times*, 17 May 2022, nytimes.com/interactive/2022/05/16/us/abortion-rights-latest.html; Weronika Strzyzynska, 'Erosion of abortion rights gathers pace around the world as US signals new era', *Guardian*, 4 May 2022.

3 Stefanie Glinski and Ruchi Kumar, 'Taliban u-turn over Afghan girls' education reveals deep leadership divisions', *Guardian*, 26 March 2022, theguardian.com/global-development/2022/mar/25/taliban-u-turn-over-afghan-girls-education-reveals-deep-leadership-divisions-afghanistan.

of Women in March 2022, with pressure against non-government organisation participation in the Commission on the Status of Women, the inclusion of references to intersectionality, climate change and even, from Russia, on the right of women to own land. Nevertheless, the Australian delegation assisted in the insertions of positive language on sexual reproduction, health rights and Indigenous women.[4]

Meanwhile, in Australia, it was only in March 2021 that, after decades of feminist campaigning, abortion was decriminalised in South Australia, the last state since Western Australia in 1998 to do so. That measure took until 7 July to become law in SA and technical restrictions, including access to public hospitals, continue in most states and territories.[5]

To return to the consequent importance of feminist memory, if we don't know where we have come from, if we don't remember how much desperately hard struggle achieved what we now take for granted, then we are in increased danger of loss. In our immediate present, if we don't remember the work it took to achieve the structure of human rights and anti-discrimination legislation built between 1975 (Racial Discrimination Act) and 2004 (Age Discrimination Act), including the Sex Discrimination Act 1984, then we might underestimate the near miss in 2021, when a failed attempt to legislate against discrimination on religious grounds threatened to undo hard won anti-discrimination measures at federal and state levels.[6]

Likewise, if we don't remember how long and hard the feminist battle has endured in Australia, we might either go on reinventing wheels or lose it all. That goes all the way back to our iconic campaigners for women's suffrage. We need to remember that those ardent suffragists wanted the vote to influence policy. What they sought in the vote was a practical tool not a symbolic right. In New South Wales, Louisa Lawson, Rose Scott, Maybanke Anderson, Dora Montefiore and their colleagues, all founders of the fight for suffrage, campaigned from personal experience against

4 Reports and briefings to member organisations by Equal Rights Alliance on the Gender Equity Forum, 2021, and UN Commission on the Status of Women 66, 2022.

5 Shari Hams, 'South Australia decriminalised abortion more than a year ago, but nothing has changed', *ABC News*, 10 May 2022, abc.net.au/news/2022-05-10/abortion-decriminalised-but-laws-not-enacted-in-sa/101051766; Erika Millar and Barbara Baird, 'Abortion is no longer a crime in Australia. But legal hurdles to access remain', *Conversation*, 4 March 2021, theconversation.com/abortion-is-no-longer-a-crime-in-australia-but-legal-hurdles-to-access-remain-156215. Human Rights Law Centre, 7 July 2022, www.hrlc.org.au.

6 Tass Livernis, President, Law Council of Australia, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 February 2022.

male violence—including rape—in marriage; for the right of married women to own property; for support from a husband's estate whatever the terms of his will; for equal access to divorce; and for a mother's custody of children on widowhood or divorce, the latter not achieved until 1934.[7] In Victoria, Vida Goldstein, when standing for federal office on five occasions from 1903, staunchly opposed, as did many suffragists, the political party system, seeing it as inappropriately male in its strategies and interests.

Likewise, as subsequent generations of Australian politicians 'discover' gender-based violence against women as a means, if inadequately funded, to demonstrate their concern for women, it is equally dangerous to forget the desperate women who grabbed the microphone at a Sydney Women's Liberation Women's Commission in 1974. That was the start of the community-based response and analysis that led to opening refuges for escaping women, then rape crisis centres and the policy recognition that followed.[8]

These are just a few of the strategic memories that underline the importance of preserving the history of past achievements in order to protect and extend our rights in the present and in the immediate future.

7 Janet Ramsay, 'The making of domestic violence policy by the Australian Commonwealth Government and the government of the state of NSW between 1970 and 1985: An analytical narrative of feminist policy activism' (University of Sydney, PhD thesis, 2005), ch. 1.

8 Janet Ramsay, 'Policy activism on a "wicked issue"': The building of Australian feminist policy on domestic violence in the 1970s', *Australian Feminist Studies* 22, no. 53 (2007): 247–50.

Feminism beyond the Binary

Yves Rees
La Trobe University

Trans and *feminism*: how do they fit together (or not) in the 2020s?

If you followed Australian media during early 2022, you'd be forgiven for thinking the sticking point was trans women. As the nation barrelled into a federal election that polls (correctly) predicted would oust the incumbent LNP, conservatives fighting for electoral survival imported TERF (trans-exclusionary radical feminist) talking points from Britain to dogwhistle to their base. For several months, trans women were the political football *de jour*. It was ugly. Warringah Liberal candidate Katherine Deves stoked alarm about trans women in sport; health secretary Brendan Murphy was asked to define 'woman' in Senate estimates; *Age* columnist Julie Szego claimed it was 'inevitable' that trans rights were in competition with women's rights.[1] The key idea behind all the noise? Trans women are not 'real' women and their attempts to claim womanhood pose a threat to cis women everywhere.

In the face of such fearmongering, the trans challenge to feminism seems obvious: how to accommodate trans women within the centuries-old women's movement? How to build a trans-inclusive feminism that everyone can get behind? This is how the issue is framed in Finn Mackay's lauded *Female Masculinities and the Gender Wars* (2021). For Mackay, a transmasc sociologist at the University of Bristol, the task for feminism is to balance trans inclusion against some cis feminists' desire for 'single-sex' (or trans-exclusionary) spaces.[2]

1 Cam Wilson, 'Katherine Deves wasn't chosen in spite of her views on trans people. She was chosen because of them', *Crikey*, 19 April 2022, crikey.com.au/2022/04/19/katherine-deves-trans-warringah-liberal-party/; Josh Butler, 'Coalition members back bill to exclude trans women from female sports', *Guardian*, 20 April 2022, theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/apr/20/coalition-members-back-bill-to-exclude-trans-women-from-female-sports; Julie Szego, 'Trans rights should not automatically trump the rights of other groups', *Age*, 6 April 2022, theage.com.au/national/victoria/trans-rights-should-not-automatically-trump-the-rights-of-other-groups-20220405-p5aaus.html.

2 Finn Mackay, *Female Masculinities and the Gender Wars* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2021), 217–19.

But I want to suggest otherwise. To my mind, the hysteria around trans women is a red herring. A feminism inclusive of trans women has been theorised and enacted since the 1970s. It's not that complicated. Trans women are women and should be treated as such. They pose no threat to cis women (and, on the contrary, experience high rates of violence and abuse). There is no evidentiary basis to think otherwise. Of course, the trans and cis experience is not identical, but the category of 'woman' has never been monolithic—as Black women, migrant women or lesbian women can attest. Any feminism worth its name must include and fight for all women. Sisterhood not cisterhood, as the saying goes.[3]

To reprise this question, and engage with the handwringing about trans women's womanhood, is to unnecessarily complicate a straightforward issue. Moreover, it plays into the hands of anti-trans figures by engaging on their terms. To seriously entertain the notion that trans women are in any way 'problematic' risks legitimising a fallacious narrative that scapegoats an oppressed minority and detracts attention from real feminist issues.

But that is not to say that transness presents no challenge to feminism. On the contrary, trans visions of gender pose a profound provocation to the 'women's movement'. Yet the real challenge is not about the borders of womanhood but the borders of feminism itself. If we accept the reality of nonbinary genders, and hence acknowledge the existence of people other than 'men' and 'women' (cis or trans), what does that mean for a political project traditionally structured around advancing women's interests in the face of male domination? A feminism for the 2020s must be a feminism that can reckon with the existence and patriarchal oppression of non-women such as nonbinary, genderqueer, transmasculine, transfeminine, agender and Two-Spirit peoples.

Put simply: how to reimagine feminism beyond the gender binary?

This is no small task, as it requires the 'women's movement' to grapple with what Cameron Awkward-Rich terms the 'displacement of *women* as the imagined subject of feminism'.[4] A shift of this magnitude cannot be accommodated with window-dressing gestures such as the in-vogue

3 On the long history of transfeminism, see Cameron Awkward-Rich, 'Trans, feminism: Or, reading like a depressed transsexual', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 42, no. 4 (2017): 819–41.
4 Awkward-Rich, 'Trans, feminism', 830.

language of 'women and nonbinary people'—rhetoric that subsumes nonbinary genders within the master category of 'woman'.[5] Nonbinary thinking is not additive; it is transformative. It demands a structural remaking of the way we conceive and articulate a feminist politics.

A daunting task, indeed. But there are certainly good reasons for doing so. Here are several.

First, the gender binary underpins patriarchy. According to Yale trans philosopher Robin Dembroff, patriarchy is based on three ideas: first, that 'male' and 'female' represent a natural, immutable and exhaustive binary; second, that males should be masculine and females feminine; and third, that masculinity is superior to femininity.[6] If patriarchy is built upon this hierarchical binary, it follows that the feminist project of dismantling patriarchy requires the disavowal of binary gender. In the words of British trans critic Shon Faye, '[t]he global dominance of men over women can never be dismantled while simultaneously maintaining, preserving and reinforcing the binary model of sex and gender'.[7] Feminism's success thus arguably depends on nonbinary thinking. Without it, even the most earnest efforts to topple patriarchy may struggle to address the problem at its root.

Second, the binary is a Western model of gender imposed as part of the colonial project. Indigenous cultures worldwide have long recognised gender diversity. For instance, an estimated 168 Indigenous languages in the United States have terms to describe genders other than man and woman.[8] Javanese culture recognises a third gender of transfeminine people called *Waria*.[9] Likewise, in Samoa, *Fa'afafine* is a third gender, a femme nonbinary space. As *Fa'afafine* Amao Leota Lu puts it, 'binaries are such a colonial way of thinking'.[10] For Indigenous peoples, the gender

5 For an expanded discussion of this point, see Yves Rees, *All About Yves: Notes from a Transition* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2021), 185–88; Jinghua Qian, 'Walking away, backwards; or, woman-lie in women's lit', *Feminist Writers Festival*, 20 November 2020, jinghuaqian.com/2020/11/20/walking-away-backwards-or-woman-lite-in-womens-lit/.

6 Robin Dembroff, 'Trans women are victims of misogyny, too', *Guardian*, 19 May 2019, theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/may/19/valerie-jackson-trans-women-misogyny-feminism.

7 Shon Faye, *The Transgender Issue: An Argument for Justice* (London: Penguin, 2021), 242.

8 Margaret Robinson, 'Two-Spirit identity in a time of gender fluidity', *Journal of Homosexuality* 67, no. 12 (2020): 1677.

9 Mama Alto in *OMG I'm QTIPOC*, ed. Bobuq Sayed (Melbourne: Drummond Street Services, 2019), 16.

10 Amao Leota Lu, 'Fa'afafine: All hail the queen (Samoan sashay)', *Archer Magazine*, 5 September 2019, archermagazine.com.au/2019/09/faafafine-all-hail-the-queen-samoan-sashay/.

binary was a weapon of colonisation. Wiradjuri trans researcher Sandy O'Sullivan describes the gender binary as 'a sharpened tool of cultural decimation' that erased existing complexities of gender and essentialised First Nations peoples as 'reproductive stock'.[11] In short, the gender binary has not only enabled patriarchy but also other systems of oppression such as colonialism. For feminism to be truly anti-colonial and anti-racist, it must divest from binary gender.

Third, the enforcement of the gender binary harms everyone, whether cis or trans. As the trans critic Jinghua Qian recently explained, 'cis people still suffer under this binary. How many cis women have discomfort with womanhood because it does have so many social constraints? The way the gender binary is enforced affects everyone'.[12] Nonbinary thinking has emancipatory potential for all humans, as it challenges the paradigm in which assigned sex determines a narrow and violently policed gender performance. In Dembroff's words, nonbinary gender 'threatens those who wish to preserve social control over sexed bodies', as it creates 'a fissure between reproductive features and social possibility'.[13] Hence, even though nonbinary people may only ever be a small minority, their existence opens up freedoms for everyone else. 'I see transness as a synonym for freedom. I see transness as a synonym for escape', says English trans artist Travis Alabanza.[14] A feminism that incorporates nonbinary ontologies promises to further the liberation of all genders.

At the All About Women festival at the Sydney Opera House in March 2022, a capacity crowd attended a panel on 'Beyond the Binary'.[15] The session was one of the first to sell out. Despite its female-oriented name, the festival and its audience recognised that feminism was no longer just a matter for women. This is not to say that everyone must live beyond the binary, or that women no longer matter within feminism.

11 Sandy O'Sullivan, 'The colonial trappings of gender', in *Nothing to Hide: Voices of Trans and Gender Diverse Australia*, ed. Sam Elkin, Alex Gallagher, Yves Rees and Bobuq Sayed (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2022), 138.

12 Jinghua Qian quoted in Caitlin Cassidy and Brigid Delaney, '"I was really scared": Grace Tame opens up about mental health, and more from All About Women', *Guardian*, 14 March 2022, theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/14/cis-people-still-suffer-under-the-gender-binary-six-lessons-from-all-about-women.

13 Robin Dembroff, 'Why be nonbinary?' *Aeon*, 30 October 2018, aeon.co/essays/nonbinary-identity-is-a-radical-stance-against-gender-segregation.

14 Travis Alabanza in *NB: My Non-Binary Life*, BBC Radio, 2019, episode 8.

15 'Beyond the binary', 13 March 2022, hosted by Yves Rees, All About Women festival, stream. sydneyoperahouse.com/products/all-about-women-2022-beyond-the-binary.

The point is that feminism, as a political project, can and must recalibrate itself to the vast terrain of human genders that already exist if it is to challenge oppressive forces and thrive in coming decades. In Shon Faye's words, 'not only do trans people need feminism, but feminism also needs trans people'.[16]

16 Faye, *The Transgender Issue*, 239.

Stitching Feminism

Madeleine C. Seys
University of Adelaide

Starting this essay, I put down my sewing, and thread my needle into the butter yellow flannel pages of my needlebook. Then, I pick up my notebook, and flip through to the page where my pen is tucked into the spine, and I have transcribed this passage from Olive Schreiner's 1926 novel *From Man to Man*:

> The woman who is only a woman, what has she but her needle? In that torn bit of brown leather brace worked through and through with yellow silk, in that bit of white rag with invisible stitching, lying among the fallen leaves and rubbish that the wind has blown into the gutter or the street corner, lies all the passion of some woman's soul finding voiceless expression. Has the pen or pencil dipped so deep in the blood of the human race as the needle?[1]

The language of cloth, needle and thread were my first form of literacy. From my earliest memories of sitting in my mother's lap at the sewing machine, dressmaking and embroidery have been how I understand the world and my place in it.[2] Before I could read and write, my needle and thread gave me a voice. In 2022, I am a feminist maker, curator, writer, educator and activist living on unceded Kaurna land in Adelaide, South Australia.[3] The traditions, histories, practices and imagery of hand stitching run through my writing and my activism and are at the heart of the change I strive to make in my communities. Schreiner's words are woven through my work; I am a woman who has a needle. Thinking back through my mother and my grandmother, my practices of slow, conscious and ethical sewing connect me to traditions of handmaking and mending that are both quotidian and radical in their subversion of hegemonic powers, knowledges

1 Olive Schreiner, *From Man to Man, or Perhaps Only* (1926; London: Virago Press, 1982), 323.

2 Madeleine Seys, '#IMadeMyClothes: The ethics and practices of home dressmaking', *Artlink: Australian Contemporary Art Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (April 2021): 30.

3 I acknowledge and pay my respects to the Kaurna people as the owners and custodians of the Adelaide plains. I pay my respects to Kaurna elders past, present and emerging and to all First Nations people. Always was, always will be, Aboriginal land. I acknowledge that colonisation continues to threaten First Nations material cultural practices and heritage.

and capitalist consumerism.[4] In the twenty-first century, handmaking is a powerful rejection of the production and consumer practices of fast fashion and its exploitation of human labour and environmental resources.[5] Handmaking is a reminder that activism begins with the personal, the embodied, the material and the local. As Betsy Greer states: 'the creation of things by hand … reminds us that we have power'.[6]

Feminist stitching derives its power through the subversion of expectations, and an exploitation of the patriarchal ignorance of the practices, epistemologies and meanings of thread and cloth. Historically, embroidery and dressmaking have been consigned to the simultaneously devalued and taken-for-granted category of 'women's work'.[7] The products of this work, such as clothing and household linen, serve the important purposes of warming, protecting and comforting us, but are then discarded as rubbish, devoid of use and meaning. So too the practices of needlework and dressmaking have been discarded from histories. Like Schreiner, many makers and thinkers have equated sewing with writing and painting, pointing out that the misogyny ingrained in the cultural hierarchy of 'art' above 'craft' has seen the work of the pen and paintbrush taken seriously as forms of artistic expression and chronicles of human experience, whilst the needle's work is discarded as decorative and ephemeral.[8] From the Middle Ages, modern sewing and embroidery practices were used as a way of educating young girls into their gender and class roles; 'embroidery has been women's art through innumerable ages, how long can only be surmised', wrote Mary Thomas in 1936.[9] Through this history, though, runs the thread of a vivid counter-history wherein embroidery and garment sewing have been used by disenfranchised individuals and communities to subvert dominant patriarchal power structures and knowledge systems.[10] In the nineteenth century, women used the slow and embodied processes of needlework, and a shared cultural knowledge of the meanings of cloth and threads, to tell stories that drew attention to the mechanisms of the white patriarchy and challenged its power.[11]

---

4 With credit to Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Hogarth Press, 1929).

5 Seys, '#IMadeMyClothes', 32.

6 Betsy Greer, *Craftivism: The Art of Craft and Activism* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2014), 8.

7 Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (New York: Routledge, 1989), vi.

8 *Dressmaking Made Easy*, revised edition (New York: McCall Publishing Company, 1939), 1.

9 Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, vi, 1–5; Mary Thomas, *Mary Thomas's Embroidery Book*, 7th impression (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1952), ix.

10 Christine Bayles Kortsch, *Dress Culture in Late Victorian Women's Fiction: Literacy, Textiles and Activism* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 5.

11 Kortsch, *Dress Culture in Late Victorian Women's Fiction*, 5.

Among such makers, I am particularly reminded of Elizabeth Parker who, in the 1830s, worked her biography on linen, using fine cross-stitches in red silk. She begins with a statement of her voicelessness as a working-class woman, stitching: 'As I cannot write'.[12] This draws attention to the fact that, although Parker is literate, the pen of history and power is not in her hands. Parker then makes an appeal for a sympathetic audience for her story of trauma: 'I put this down freely and simply', she stitches, 'as I might speak to a person to whose intimacy and tenderness I can fully entrust myself'.[13] Parker was a domestic servant from Sussex, England. In 1,654 words and 6,475 characters stitched over 46 lines, Parker recounts her childhood, her entry into domestic service, her abuse at the hands of her employer 'Lieutenant G', and its impact on her mental health and Christian faith.[14] Parker's last thread is neatly secured at the back of the linen, but her final questions dangles, poignant and unfinished: 'what will become of my soul[?]'.[15] The embroidered sampler is a powerful medium for Parker; it allows her to recount her experiences and appeal for help and solidarity from 'a person', most likely a woman, versed in the function of embroidery as a form of communication, 'to whose intimacy and tenderness I can fully entrust myself'.[16] The patriarchal disregard of embroidery as anything other than facile 'women's work' and an expression of ideal, submissive femininity, protects Parker and her story from threatening eyes and further violence. Parker's sampler survives today, in London's Victoria & Albert Museum, as a testimony to how needlework can bring attention to injustices, create community, compassion, wellbeing and speak back to power.[17] For twenty-first-century makers, the threads of our stitching connect us in community with Elizabeth Parker.

In 2003, Greer coined the term 'craftivism' to describe the practices whereby craft, broadly conceived, is used as a form of activism. Craftivism voices and protests injustice, connects communities and improves individual and collective wellbeing.[18] In 'We the craftivists: A manifesto' (2018), Tal Fitzpatrick calls on 'A patchwork of makers, diverse but united in kinship'. She states:

12 Elizabeth Parker, 'Sampler', c.1830, *Victoria & Albert Museum*, collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O70506/sampler-parker-elizabeth/.
13 Content warning: discussion of sexual and physical abuse and suicidal ideation (Elizabeth Parker, 'Sampler').
14 Elizabeth Parker, 'Sampler'.
15 Elizabeth Parker, 'Sampler'.
16 Elizabeth Parker, 'Sampler'.
17 Nikki Sullivan and Britt Burton, *Stitch & Resist*, Centre of Democracy, History Trust of South Australia and State Library of South Australia (Blurb, 2021), 1.
18 Greer, *Craftivism*.

> We stand for justice, universally applied.
>
> Through our craft we bear witness.
>
> With our skilled hands and compassionate hearts, we mend the tears in the fabric of our society.[19]

In 2020, the start of the Covid-19 pandemic prompted feminist activists to direct, or redirect, our attention inwards, towards our personal, embodied and material practices, and towards the injustices and crises close to home and within our own communities. The conditions of the pandemic and responses to it tore wide open long-standing holes in the fabric of society and unravelled the social safety net, increasing the incidence of poverty, homelessness, social isolation, racism, domestic violence and inequality. Job losses and changes in work conditions disproportionately impacted those in precarious employment and those with caring responsibilities. There were significant cultural shifts, too. Lockdowns and isolation mandates resulted in a turn towards domestic activities such as craft, baking and preserving as recreation and self-care practices, as well as community care.[20] Far from representing a nostalgia for, or return to, traditional and oppressive domestic gender roles, such practices continue to be mobilised as ethical alternatives to wasteful consumer habits. The pandemic also changed consumer fashion practices with more people reusing, repairing and recycling garments rather than shopping, and thus breaking the fast-fashion cycle.[21] By necessity, activist practices also changed with the Covid-19 pandemic, pivoting towards personal behaviours, digital activism and local community service. Craftivism reflects and represents these changing habits and practices. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the feminist maker's needle has been a powerful tool in bearing witness, creating compassion and making change within our communities.

In my own community, a public participatory craftivist project, *Stitch & Resist*, became a way of bearing witness to the experiences of the pandemic and bringing attention to the holes it rent in our society. *Stitch & Resist*

19 Tal Fitzpatrick, *Craftivism: A Manifesto/Methodology* (Melbourne: self published), 1.

20 The resurgence of popularity in crafts such as needlecraft, knitting, crocheting, macramé and dressmaking could be connected to what Addie Martindale and Ellen McKinney identify as a broader pattern post-9/11. See Addie Martindale and Ellen McKinney, 'Self-sewn identity: How female home sewers use garment sewing to control self-presentation', *Journal of Consumer Culture* 20, no. 4 (2020): 567.

21 See Orsola de Castro, *Loved Clothes Last: How the Joy of Rewearing and Repairing Your Clothes Can Be a Revolutionary Act* (London: Penguin, 2021).

was launched in March 2020 as a collaboration between the History Trust of South Australia and the State Library of South Australia's Centre of Democracy to 'support individuals and communities to play an active and creative role in civic engagement and change making'.[22] With the onset of the Covid-19 crisis, the project pivoted to digital delivery, and the focus shifted to explore the experiences and impact of the pandemic. Participants, some experienced stitchers and some new to the craft, were invited to use our needles to: 'make political statements / make important cultural objects / make a difference / and make change'.[23] Over a year, participants uploaded images of their handiwork to www.stitchandresist.com/. The archive compromises 157 pieces by 80 individuals and groups. Most pieces use a combination of text (in many languages), visual iconography and colour to communicate their message and are worked in the media of cross stitch and embroidery. Some directly address life during the pandemic, with messages such as: 'Stay the Fuck Home' and 'Don't be a prick. Wash your hands & wear a mask'.[24] Others explore pre-existing issues brought to crisis point by and during the Covid-19 pandemic, such as racism, reconciliation, asylum seeker rights, the wage gap, trans+ rights, feminism, homophobia, marriage equality, LGBTQIA+ rights, domestic and gender-based violence, misogyny, consent, sex workers' rights, abortion rights, the #Me Too movement, homelessness and housing precarity, diet culture, the Black Lives Matter movement, police brutality, white privilege, climate change, food security and the devaluing of so-called 'women's work'. My own submission for the project, 'We Part to Meet Again', uses the nineteenth-century tradition of sampler embroidery to record my experiences during Covid-19 in 2020, particularly that of being in lockdown and isolated from my loved ones. The design is based on a pair of dressmaking scissors I inherited (along with my love of threads) from my grandmother. I embroidered the patina on their handles, acquired over years of being held in her hands, a reminder of the power of my own hands to make, to mend and to change. The text is borrowed from a nineteenth-century sweetheart token and is a pun on the scissors' mechanism; the blades separate and come back together,

22 Sullivan and Burton, *Stitch & Resist*, 1.

23 'Stitch & Resist', *The Centre of Democracy*, stitchandresist.com/.

24 Kel G in Sullivan and Burton, *Stitch & Resist*, 66; CB in Sullivan and Burton, *Stitch & Resist*, 22. In these and subsequent references to individual embroideries in the *Stitch & Resist* project, the numbers refer to the order in which the works are reproduced in the unpaginated *Stitch & Resist* exhibition book.

just as people part and are reunited. The threads of this work connect me to these loved ones, to my mother and grandmother and to histories of feminist stitching.

What separates the works of craftivism in *Stitch & Resist* from other forms of activism during 2020–21 is the painstaking, embodied nature of their production. Each message is worked stitch by stitch, letter by letter, word by word. With the slow making of each piece comes the deep and sustained consideration of the issue at hand. In *Seamlessness* Yeseung Lee refers to 'the attentive interaction between maker and material as a process of mutual making'.[25] Through stitching these pieces and collaborating in forming a collective, democratic material archive of life during the Covid-19 pandemic, participants in *Stitch & Resist* are remaking our habits, practices and identities as makers and activists. The slow, embodied nature of embroidery was a way to reinvigorate our activism in the relative isolation of the pandemic and a reminder to 'resist' and be an 'angry liberal feminist killjoy' because 'Persistence is Fruitful'.[26] Collectively, these pieces dip deep into the individual and collective experiences of Covid-19 in 2020–21.

Tying up the loose ends of this essay, I put down my pen and open my needlebook again. I cut a length of blood red stranded silk, thread my needle and begin to work Schreiner's question across a piece of linen: 'Has the pen or pencil dipped so deep in the blood of the human race as the needle?'[27] In my own feminist stitching, I answer this question, slowly and decidedly, in the negative. The threads of this work connect me to my mother and grandmother who gave me my love of and literacy in cloth and threads, and to a long and rich history of makers who used their needle and thread to tell their story and craft change. In the age of Covid-19, the craftivist's needle remains a powerful and radical tool to mend our relationships with each other, our communities and our environment, and to make change.

25 Yeseung Lee, *Seamlessness: Making and (un)Knowing in Fashion Practice* (Bristol: Intellect, 2016), 4.
26 Amy Dale in Sullivan and Burton, *Stitch & Resist*, 2; Gin in Sullivan and Burton, *Stitch & Resist*, 38. Gin's embroidered message evokes the words of Sara Ahmed and her identification as a 'feminist killjoy'. Amy Freeborn in Sullivan and Burton, *Stitch & Resist*, 3. The text in Freeborn's embroidery is quoted from Anthony Burrill.
27 Schreiner, *From Man to Man*, 323.

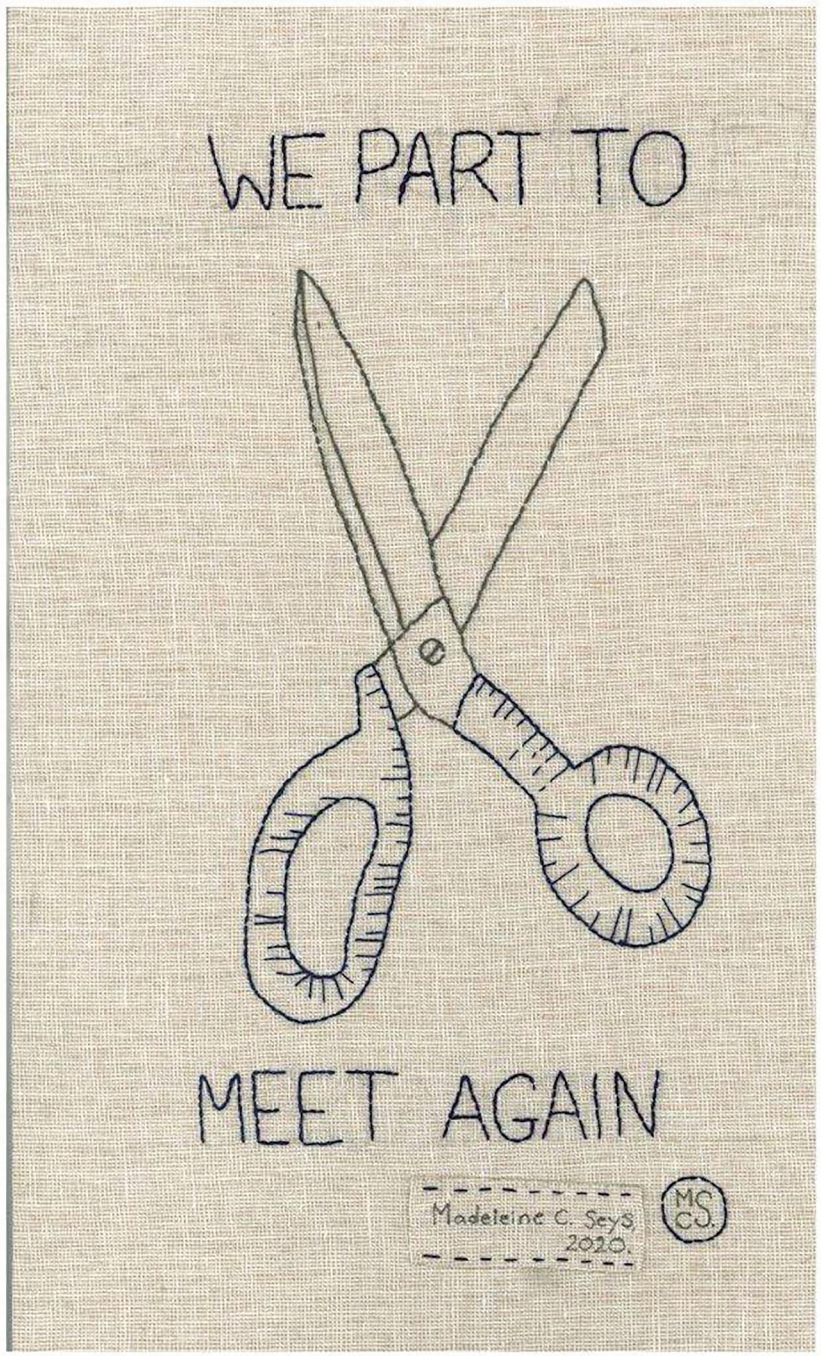

Figure 1: 'We Part to Meet Again'.
Source: Madeleine C. Seys, 2020.

Solidarity and Justice

Jordana Silverstein
University of Melbourne

My first thought: what is 'doing feminism'?

My next thought: 'what is feminism'?

I suppose 'doing feminism' could indicate an orientation, a set of work that we undertake, an emotional connection, a way of thinking about the world and putting it into practice. Do I 'do feminism'? I am unsure. I'm certain that I (try to) 'do' solidarity, and work towards justice and orient myself towards those others with whom I want to be in partnership. That I critique and question. That I try to enact a form of Jewishness—Jewish memory, history, politics, femininity and embodiment—that is beautiful and imaginative.

But in terms of how 'feminism' has developed in Australia, and particularly how it has developed in the last couple of years, I feel less and less attached to it, as a movement, or a way of defining and articulating what I do.

In a piece in the *Guardian* in March 2022, writer Sisonke Msimang wrote about the place that Grace Tame and Brittany Higgins have come to hold in the popular discussion, noting that '[w]hat is worth pointing out though, is that Tame's elevation to heroine status is indicative of a women's rights movement that can still only hear hard truths when they are delivered by white women. Her ascendancy is also indicative of a media environment that creates darlings based on its own image of itself'. She further wrote that it is 'important to question their centrality, to ask why their stories have so much traction when there are so many women whose fights for justice have been long and serious and just as compelling as those of Tame and Higgins'.[1]

1 Sisonke Msimang, 'Grace Tame and Brittany Higgins are supremely admirable, and the acceptable white faces of Australian feminism', *Guardian*, 7 March 2022, theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/07/grace-tame-and-brittany-higgins-are-supremely-admirable-and-the-acceptable-white-faces-of-australian-feminism.

Amy McQuire wrote in 2019 about the difference between the Black Witness and the White Witness. Starting from a description of the ways that white women—here, Kerri-Anne Kennerly—will centre themselves and their colonial worldview in order to dictate the terms through which Aboriginal lives should be understood and known, McQuire shows how colonial representations are a form of violence. They seek to dehistoricise and disconnect. On the contrary though, the Black Witness seeks to describe in order to connect and uplift:

> We use this language to raise our young people and elders as resistance fighters and warriors in ways that do not victimise, but instead instil strength. Our communities are not 'war zones' of killing, but epicentres of survival. Our women are not helpless, but on the frontlines of battle, and our children are not the objects of neglect but the very reason for fighting in the first place. While the White Witness thrives on accounts of the brutalisation of black bodies, most commonly of black women and children, the Black Witness pushes these same black women to the forefront—they are the ones with the megaphones in the centre of the Melbourne CBD—in the very heart of white, respectable space.[2]

I have returned to this piece by McQuire a few times over the last couple of years, learning something new each time. If I am doing feminism, this is part of what it means to me: to return again and again to the words of First Nations people to learn what I can about different ways of seeing and knowing. To try to learn, as best I can, what anti-colonial thinking looks like. I want to ensure that I learn in an ethical mode that is never extractive. I hope this is what I do. I am unsure if I am successful.

For we know of course of the long history of white feminism in this country, of the ways that white women have located themselves at the centre, the way feminist movements have been an integral part of the broader colonial project. And we know that white feminist historians have been part of this problem too: that discussions of women's histories have too often been merely discussions of white women's histories, with Aboriginal women and non-white women relegated to a throwaway sentence or not present at all. This is a problem that persists today in our historiography.

2 Amy McQuire, 'Black and white witness', *Meanjin*, Winter 2019, meanjin.com.au/essays/black-and-white-witness/.

To do feminism, as a historian, in the year 2022 for me therefore is to try to not look towards those who are taking up the dominant hegemonic white spaces. So to do feminism, to write feminist history, is also to think deeply about what it means to be a Jewish historian—or a historian who thinks with and alongside some other Jews and some Jewish ways of knowing—in this time and this place, with connections around the world.

I write these words in May 2022, while the inquest into the murder of Gunditjmara, Dja Dja Wurrung, Wiradjuri and Yorta Yorta woman Veronica Nelson at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre in 2020 is taking place at the Coroner's Court, just down the road from where I am sitting. I have attended a few days of the hearing into her death in custody, following the call from Ms Nelson's family and from the staunch leaders who run the Dhadjowa Foundation, sitting in solidarity and support of Ms Nelson's family and community.[3] I send my love and respect to them. They are suffering a loss that is beyond what should be possible. Ms Nelson must be remembered as they describe her, 'a deeply spiritual woman, whose connection to her culture was incredibly important to her', 'a helper … she would give whatever she could to those who needed it', 'Veronica was resilient and had a fighting spirit. Veronica had a big personality and a beautiful laugh. She made the world better for those around her and she was deeply loved'.[4]

If 'doing feminism in 2022' is to have any meaning for me, it is in the recognition of my place within this settler colony; my gratitude towards the Kulin Nation for hosting this granddaughter of Holocaust survivors and stateless refugees on their Country; my deep respect to First Nations peoples for their continuous fight, generosity, knowledge, insights and world-making; my rage and grief at the ongoing murder and dispossession at the heart of this settler-colony; my commitment to turn up when needed; my certainty that studying and writing history, that respecting our pasts and our memories, that learning from the wisdom of others, can be powerful forces in helping us create the futures we dream of.

3 See *The Dhadjowa Foundation*, dhadjowa.com.au/.

4 'Veronica Marie Nelson: Inquest begins today', *VALS*, 26 April 2022, vals.org.au/veronica-marie-nelson-inquest-begins-today/.

Depp v. Heard: A Feminist *Mea Culpa*

Zora Simic
UNSW

The week I sat down to write this reflection, the big news story was that the actor Johnny Depp had won his defamation case against his former wife Amber Heard, sparked by a 2018 opinion piece written by Heard and published by the *Washington Post* in which she described herself as a 'public figure representing domestic abuse'.[1] Depp's name was not mentioned, but he sued for libel and sought damages to compensate for lost earnings, prompting Heard to countersue on the basis that she had endured domestic violence during their 15-month marriage. After a six-week televised trial, a deluge of media coverage and a massive viral pro-Depp campaign, a seven-person jury unanimously found that Heard could not substantiate her claims and awarded Depp US$15 million in damages.

The larger cultural impact of the Depp-Heard court case—together with the preceding November 2020 United Kingdom libel case in which Depp lost against the tabloid the *Sun*, who described him as a 'wife-beater' after the judge ruled the claim was 'substantially true'—will no doubt be assessed for months and years to come, including by feminist historians.[2] In the immediate wake of the verdict, feminist legal historian Jessica Lake very usefully placed the case in a larger history of the gendered dimensions of defamation law in the United States:

1 Amber Heard, 'I spoke up against sexual violence – and faced our culture's wrath. That has to change', *Washington Post*, 18 December 2018, washingtonpost.com/opinions/ive-seen-how-institutions-protect-men-accused-of-abuse-heres-what-we-can-do/2018/12/18/71fd876a-02ed-11e9-b5df-5d3874f1ac36_story.html.

2 'Johnny Depp loses libel case over *Sun* "wife beater" claim', *BBC News*, 2 November 2020, bbc.com/news/uk-54779430.

> Historically the common law of defamation was built to protect public men in their professions and trades. It worked to both defend their reputations and shut down speech about them as a group.[3]

Other feminist commentators shared Lake's concern that the verdict would deter other women from coming forward with their own claims of sexual and domestic abuse. Most, however, tended to provide a more discrete historical narrative; the verdict, the widespread support for Depp and the misogynist vilification of Heard together constituted a backlash to, or even the end of, the #Me Too movement. 'We are in a moment of virulent antifeminist backlash', wrote Moira Donegan in the *Guardian*, 'and the modest gains that were made in that era are being retracted with a gleeful display of victim-blaming at a massive scale'.[4]

On the day of the verdict, I was contacted by a number of Australian media outlets to provide commentary. One journalist sought a #Me Too angle, citing my reviews of many books about #Me Too. Another asked me to comment on the case in relation to its implication for survivors of domestic violence, presumably because, along with Ann Curthoys and Catherine Kevin, I am part of a team of historians currently researching an Australian Research Council funded history of domestic violence in Australia. A third requested gender studies expertise, including in relation to celebrity and social media. I politely and guiltily declined them all, taking care in each instance to make suggestions for other scholars to approach.

Sometimes saying 'no' is necessary in my job (or jobs) as a feminist scholar and sort-of-public feminist, including because more often than not I say 'yes'. (I could have written my whole reflection about the yes/no conundrum, an abbreviated version of which would read: if you have secure employment, you should feel obliged to peer-review articles and examine theses about feminist topics, within reason, but no more committees.) Despite this propensity, media requests do not usually elicit guilt, particularly given some are so niche or sweeping as to defy any sense of expertise (e.g. 'can you tell me the history of the sex tape?' or 'where does sexism come from?').

3 Jessica Lake, 'Could the Depp v. Heard case make other abuse survivors too scared to speak up?', *Conversation*, 2 June 2022, theconversation.com/could-the-depp-v-heard-case-make-other-abuse-survivors-too-scared-to-speak-up-184324.

4 Moira Donegan, 'The Amber Heard-Johnny Depp trial was an orgy of misogyny', 2 June 2022, theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jun/01/amber-heard-johnny-depp-trial-metoo-backlash.

With the Depp–Heard case, however, I saw the value in making some sort of informed contribution, including to counter the mountains of misinformation, and to draw attention to some of the important interventions that had already been made, such as those from US sociologist Dr Nicole Bedera, who resourcefully used Twitter to draw out the consequences of the trial for survivors of gender-based violence.

I was also prepared to myth-bust, counter-argue and contextualise given I'd already spent weeks answering questions from family, friends, students and colleagues about the trial. My 12-year-old niece told me that TikTok coverage left her confused as Amber Heard was made to seem like a truly horrible person, but surely, she continued, there was more to it (yes, smart Stella!). My sister, who doesn't have a Twitter or Facebook account, was surprised to discover that it was a defamation trial, and not a domestic violence case, at least not officially. At an election night party, I was cornered at least three times by old acquaintances eager to test their assessments before a proper feminist authority—all of them pretty much identical (mutual abuse, terrible people, especially her). A male colleague I've always gotten on well with, meanwhile, ambushed me with a stream of vitriol about how 'crazy' women could so easily ruin the careers of successful men.

A missed opportunity to educate, however, was not the primary reason I felt guilty about saying no to media requests on this occasion. During the earlier UK defamation trial in 2020, I'd temporarily been sucked into the pro-Depp vortex when I couldn't sleep and went down a Twitter rabbit hole where all clicks led to more 'evidence' that Depp had been set up and that Heard had past form. And before I knew it, and before the sun had even come up, I posted my half-formed thoughts on Facebook. If memory serves, I added some qualifications that the trial was still underway and somewhat 'exceptional', but if Winona Ryder and Kate Moss said he had never abused them, then … I deleted the whole thread by breakfast, but not before I'd empowered some others to share their own ill-informed reservations or before one of my PhD students warned me, gently, not to join the public pillorying of an alleged victim of domestic violence.

What was I thinking?? I still wince thinking about feminist friends who may have seen my thread (or even worse, anti-feminist 'friends'—I'm sure I've got some on Facebook, even if I don't know who they are). Some feminists even joined in, sharing their own mixed feelings. As a future

case study in the history of emotions, the Depp and Heard defamation trial offers a bulging archive, as well as a shadow one of deleted threads, comments and animated conversations nowhere recorded.

Given how bleak 2022 has been in terms of attacks on the rights of women and gender and sexual minorities globally, there are plenty of more important issues I could have written about for *Lilith.* Undoubtedly, the defeat of *Roe v. Wade* in the United States will eclipse *Depp v. Heard* as a defining episode with far more at stake (and, of course, the US is hardly the only country in which reproductive freedom has to be fought for). Yet it has been the Depp-initiated defamation case, with its toxic mix of celebrity worship, latent and unabashed misogyny, trial-by-media and victim-blaming, that—for a few weeks at least—tested my feminism the most, for better and for worse.

REVIEWS

Australian Historical Association Conference 2022: 'Urgent Histories'

Bridget Andresen
University of Queensland

Australian Historical Association Conference 2022: 'Urgent Histories'
27 June – 1 July 2022
Deakin University, Geelong Waterfront Campus

The 2022 Australian Historical Association Conference, held on Wadawurrung Country at the Deakin University Waterfront Campus, kicked off on 27 June as the AHA's first hybrid event. The conference opened with the outgoing Presidential Address by Melanie Oppenheimer. The days that followed comprised eight keynotes and 117 parallel sessions, book launches, round tables, plenaries and off-site historical tours (plus, of course, countless social events in between). The Australian Women's History Network (AWHN) stream contributed 20 presentations across three days and all showcased the importance of centralising gender in historical inquiry.

With the *Roe v. Wade* ruling overturned by the Supreme Court of the United States days before the conference began, the theme 'Urgent Histories' seemed all too fitting for those studying gender history. The impassioned response seen not only in America, but also in Australia, meant that issues of bodily autonomy and consent were at the forefront of many presentations. The AWHN proudly co-sponsored the opening keynote address by Zora Simic. Presenting research from her Australian Research Council Special Initiative Research Grant, *A History of Domestic Violence in Australia, 1850–2020*, with co-investigators Ann Curthoys and Catherine Kevin, Simic traced domestic violence in Australia from the 1970s to the present day. Arguing that such history was an 'intractably urgent' issue that has been shrouded in a 'veil of silence', Simic noted that while overall violence has decreased in recent decades, rates of domestic

violence have remained steady. She highlighted that this issue has historically been understood as heterosexual, remembering how 'second wave' feminists established 'battered women's shelters', and urged us to reconsider the issue from an intersectional lens. Although undoubtedly a confronting issue, this keynote firmly posited gender as front and centre for the conference that followed.

In line with contemporaneous discussions about changing consent laws, implementing new coercive control laws, and the popularity of figures such as Brittany Higgins and Grace Tame, it is perhaps unsurprising that the AWHN keynote panel was 'Understanding Consent in Twentieth Century Australia'. I was honoured to be part of this alongside Lisa Featherstone, both of us discussing our work on sexual violence, and Cassandra Byrnes, sharing her new and topical research about reproductive coercive control. Conversations on gendered violence were continued by Catherine Kevin, who diversified the discussion by examining abuse in popular culture, and Paige Mahoney, who argued that newspaper reporting on sexual violence in colonial Victoria was influenced by a strong desire to uphold standards of editorial propriety.

The importance of intersectional approaches to history was highlighted across a number of presentations. Jane Carey gave a timely presentation on birth control, arguing that its history is inherently linked with eugenics, and that it was the Black Lives Matter movement, not feminism, that foregrounded this issue in recent years. Jennifer Caligari examined Bessie Lee's role in the Women's Christian Temperance Union in New Zealand and questioned the supposed inclusion of Māori women. She argued that adult Māori women were often overlooked by the predominantly white WCTU and that, instead, it was Māori children who were of greater concern to the movement. Yuan Jing shared a special presentation on the Hui'an people of China. She introduced us to the centuries-old traditions of her culture and discussed some general characteristics and social stereotypes, many of which challenged typical Eurocentric understandings of Chinese society.

What was particularly enthralling about all of the research showcased as part of the AHWN stream was the sheer breadth of topics investigated and how we as audiences were forced to rethink our understandings of historical issues. In Michelle Staff's presentation on female experts in the mid-twentieth century, she noted that the topic was often associated with 'second wave' feminists whose expertise was on 'women's issues',

but a deeper look into the past reveals women who were experts in fields not explicitly tied to this label. Sarah Fulford highlighted the experiences and the struggles of Australian nurses during the Vietnam War and argued that focusing solely on the masculine experience of this time misrepresents the war's history. Chelsea Barnett revisited the classic Australian film, *The Sum of Us* (1994). Noting that previous research on this film has focused on the queer identity of the son, she pivoted to provide an entertaining and detailed analysis of the dynamic between father and son. Rachel Fensham, the chief investigator for the Australian Cultural Data Engine grant, tackled the issue of researching gender in databases, focusing on the problem of tracking name changes, and argued that improving catalogues would help to ensure that gendered experiences would not be lost. The issue of invisible histories was further discussed by Nadia Bailley, who showed us how to find traces of female same-sex attraction in the public press, using a study from an incest trial to build her case.

Special mention goes to Kate Laing, Bethany Phillips-Peddlesden, Natasha Walker, Micaela Pattison, Jeannine Baker and Thea Gardiner, all of whom contributed important presentations to the AWHN stream. Every panel added a new and nuanced layer of depth to understanding the history of gender and sexuality and it was a pleasure to attend each session. It was very special to see so many postgraduate students in this space too, showcasing how much the field is continuing to grow.

Save Our Sons: Women, Dissent and Conscription during the Vietnam War

Emma Carson
University of Adelaide

Save Our Sons: Women, Dissent and Conscription during the Vietnam War
Carolyn Collins
(Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2021, 360pp. AU$35)
ISBN: 9781925835960

Carolyn Collins's monograph is a fascinating and, at times, incredibly touching history of Australian women's opposition to the Vietnam War. Based on her award-winning doctoral thesis, it chronicles the development, activities and eventual demise of the 'Save Our Sons' (SOS) movement that was founded in Sydney in May 1965 and soon expanded to an almost-national scale. Her research contributes to the historiography of Vietnam War opposition and offers much-needed attention to the SOS movement, which, while it had a major presence in anti-conscription demonstrations across Australia, is often overlooked in favour of research on the more vocal student movements.

The ambitious aim of this study is to expand on the scant literature about this organisation by providing the first national history of the SOS. In her fourth chapter especially, Collins provides a detailed summary of all the SOS groups that formed after the first one in Sydney. She emphasises that, unlike in previous studies that assess SOS as a single entity, these separate groups were autonomous and varied in terms of their core characteristics. In all other chapters, Collins ensures that she does not just focus on the founding Sydney SOS group, but also uses key events in the other states as evidence, especially those in Victoria and Queensland. There is some privileging of the eastern states, owing to the larger quantity of surviving sources documenting their activities, but South Australian

and Western Australian enthusiasts should rest assured that Collins offers a fair coverage of their regional groups and is faithful to her aim of writing a national history.

In the first part of the monograph, Collins challenges previous conceptions of the SOS in popular media and historical studies by emphasising that the 'respectable', middle-class image that the SOS presented was intentionally exaggerated by the organisation to reduce suspicion from ASIO about its communist affiliations. Instead, she demonstrates that there was no 'typical' SOS supporter, instead offering concise biographies that showcase the diversity of women (and men) who contributed to the movement, including their ages, socio-economic backgrounds, political and religious affiliations, vocations and nationalities. Collins demonstrates that, while SOS was not strictly a women's movement, its factions successfully weaponised traditional notions of femininity, especially the 'maternalist rhetoric' that was a common trope in twentieth-century women's activism. Collins argues that SOS's appropriation of maternalist rhetoric ultimately made the Vietnam protest movement more appealing and accessible to a wider range of people, including apolitical, middle-class women, and made it easier for their opponents to sympathise with their position.

In the second half of the book, Collins charts how the SOS campaigns radicalised over time, especially after the 1966 federal election. She argues that, by the end of the 1960s, SOS transitioned from law-abiding, traditional means of protest, to engaging in lawbreaking behaviour, by disrupting parliamentary proceedings with 'sit ins' and inciting young men to defy the National Services Act. In her final chapter, Collins offers a nuanced assessment of SOS's impact on the Australian government's response to the Vietnam War and reflects on the tangible ways that they affected the political climate. She asserts that one of the least publicised, but most vital, contributions of the SOS to the anti-war movement was their involvement in 'underground' networks that hid draft resistors, offering counselling to men who opposed the national services, and raising funds to pay the legal costs, fines and bail of fellow protestors. She also evaluates the impact of SOS involvement on the women themselves and suggests that it inspired many, some of whom were new to activism, to join other prominent movements in the period, including women's liberation, multiculturalism and environmentalism.

Collins's assertions are supported by a solid methodology, drawing on a wide range of primary sources, including official records from SOS groups, personal correspondence, autobiographies, police and intelligence reports, newspaper articles and oral histories. In addition to repurposing material from other studies, such as oral histories that were conducted by Pauline Armstrong for her research on the Victorian SOS, Collins delves into previously uncharted material, including 30 interviews that she conducted with former SOS women and their families and ASIO files on SOS members.

Collins's prose is clear and lacks needless jargon. She opens each chapter with a quote from someone involved with the SOS movement and a narrative that summarises a significant event from a former member's perspective. This effectively draws the reader into each section of the book and humanises the movement and its activists. While some knowledge of the Vietnam War and twentieth-century Australia is assumed, you do not need to be an expert in either of these fields to follow the chapters and understand the author's arguments. It is an accessible book that is of public interest and is a great introductory text for undergraduate students and feminist historians on women's activism in Vietnam-era Australia.

Sound Citizens: Australian Women Broadcasters Claim Their Voice, 1923–1956

Belinda Eslick
University of Queensland

Sound Citizens: Australian Women Broadcasters Claim Their Voice, 1923–1956
Catherine Fisher
(Canberra: ANU Press, 2021, 196pp. AU$55)
ISBN: 9781760464301

Catherine Fisher's *Sound Citizens* offers a valuable and much-needed account of the significant contributions of female broadcasters in Australia, tracking women's involvement in radio from the introduction of radio broadcasting in 1923 to the introduction of television in 1956. Fisher organises this account around discussions of the significance of female broadcasters during the interwar period, through the Second World War, and in post-war Australia. Importantly, the book challenges the view that the designation of separate 'women's programs' on radio merely reinforced patriarchal expectations of women's civic role (i.e. as restricted to the home). *Sound Citizens* offers an important cultural representation of women's voices in Australian broadcasting and in public discourse more broadly, demonstrating how women used radio to advocate for social change and to encourage other women to engage in local, national and global affairs—often by making important links between the 'private' and 'public' spheres. As Fisher convincingly argues, radio transformed women's lives because it was a medium that women working in the home could engage with while doing unpaid or paid domestic work and care.

Early in the book, Fisher notes some perceptions of women's voices on radio as 'too shrill' or 'lacking in authority' (8). However, these sections are brief, and Fisher does not ruminate on the sometimes negative reception of women's voices on radio. Instead, Fisher offers more evidence

of those defending the place of women's voices on the airwaves than of those who considered female voices out of place—evidence that 'women speakers could, and did, exhibit good radio voices that conformed to the highest standards of elocution' (9). Fisher also details many prominent female broadcasters including Ruby Rich, whose broadcast scripts from the 1930s and 1940s are 'some of the best examples of the evocative power of radio speech as a form of social activism' (65). As Fisher notes, Rich 'underlined or capitalised words that needed to be stressed, included numerous exclamation points, noted where she should pause to breathe … and … wrote … in a conversational and engaging style that brought the scripts to life' (65). Fisher's case studies of broadcasters like Rich, who was a feminist and peace activist and 'believed in the power of talking to a female audience', demonstrate that women were highly skilled, socially and politically important orators (65).

The book first tracks the development of women's involvement with radio alongside and amongst the activity of women's organisations in Australia during the interwar period. Women's organisations of this period 'recognised the role of radio as a tool that was especially well suited to raising the political consciousness of women in the home' (34). For example, the Housewives Association used radio to promote 'an image of the civically engaged housewife who made problems such as the price of bread and milk into political issues' while emphasising the need for women to organise and act collectively (34). Fisher gives important emphasis to class in her analysis and describes how some broadcasters, including the organising secretary of the Housewives Association, built class consciousness among listeners by emphasising the need to organise for the benefit of the poor. However, Fisher also makes clear how broadcasting roles (and thus a public voice) were largely reserved for those with class and racial privilege, showing how radio reinforced 'exclusionary discourses of women's public citizenship by highlighting a white, middle-class ideal of who should occupy public space' (105).

Fisher also describes the important social function of women's broadcasting during key historical periods such as the Great Depression and WWII, describing the ways that radio encouraged a sense of community and shared experience. However, women's more overt political messages and social advocacy were limited through WWII, when, as Fisher notes, radio was heavily censored by the Department of Information. As in other industries, however, the war brought opportunities for women to fill male-dominated industries or male-only roles, including in broadcasting.

Fisher notes that by 1942, over 20 per cent of the ABC's staff had joined the armed forces, which created opportunities for women to join the broadcasting ranks as technicians, sound officers, journalists, librarians, producers and announcers. Female broadcasters used radio during the war to demonstrate that women were engaged and active citizens and to emphasise women's experiences of the war and contributions to the war effort. Following the war, female broadcasters used radio to express 'the need for greater numbers of women in public affairs' and to bring discussion of women's equality into the public discourse (96). However, the role of radio for women shifted, as Fisher notes, in the 1940s and 1950s in the lead-up to the launch of television. During this time, talk-based women's sessions, which had 'provided women with a platform to contribute to public discourse', made way for radio serials and soap operas that 'treated women as listener-consumers who took in advertising messages along with addictive storylines' (120).

While female broadcasters were mostly relegated to designated 'women's hours' during the period that Fisher details, *Sound Citizens* leaves an impression that women dominated the airwaves on both public and commercial broadcasting during this time. The positive contribution of women's voices—both literal and figurative—to Australian broadcasting is overwhelmingly foregrounded in the book. This feels especially valuable and important given the ways that male voices dominate radio in contemporary Australia, especially on news, talkback and primetime programs on commercial FM stations. Importantly, *Sound Citizens* carves out a space in Australian radio as absolutely the rightful place of women.

Vera Deakin and the Red Cross

Nicola Ritchie
Monash University

Vera Deakin and the Red Cross
Carole Woods
(Australia: Royal Historical Society of Victoria, 2020, 244pp. AU$35)
ISBN: 9781875173105

In Carole Woods's biography, *Vera Deakin and the Red Cross*, there is no room for speculation on the internal life and thoughts of its subject, Vera[1]. This readable and fast-paced biography is a welcome addition to the limited scholarship on Vera and will hopefully lead to a wider interest in her life and legacy that, until now, has mostly been confined to the work of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria.[2] The work focuses primarily on Vera's experiences during World War I (WWI) as she established the Australian Red Cross Wounded and Missing Bureau (RCWMB), but glosses over her post-war life and work in World War II (WWII). This book provides an important foundational text for further research, although is stretched a bit far in trying to provide a comprehensive biography of both Vera Deakin and the Red Cross in Australia, as implied by the title.

One of few women to serve in an official capacity in both world wars, Vera opened the Australian branch of the RCWMB in 1915. The RCWMB would move from Cairo to London as the Australian Imperial Force moved from the Ottoman Empire to Europe. Woods deftly combines the personal effects the war had on Vera and her wide circle of friends, many of a similar stock to her privileged background, with the wider military and political context of Europe. The book assumes

1 Vera Deakin is referred to by her first name due to the plethora of Deakin family members in the book.

2 This is the first book about Vera alone, though she has featured in monographs published by the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* and the Australian War Memorial. Vera and her work are also briefly referenced in Marina Larsson, *Shattered Anzacs: Living with the Scars of War* (Sydney: University of NSW Press, 2009); Bruce Scates, Rebecca Wheatley, and Laura James, *World War One: A History in 100 Stories* (Melbourne: Viking, 2015).

a basic level of knowledge about the major elements of WWI including the socio-political breakdown of Europe and the Australian conscription debates. The section on the battles of Bullecourt in April and May 1917 is a good example of this, deftly combining Charles Bean's reflections on the battle with a longer section considering how Vera was personally impacted. This book is clearly well researched, drawing on under-utilised primary resources and personal accounts Woods received from Vera's descendants. It engages well with secondary literature when it discusses the difficulties suffered by Australian families mourning their absent kin. As for primary sources, we get a sense of Vera's voice, her foibles and her strong, sometimes autocratic personality, much more than most Australian women who served in the Great War are usually allowed. This is a treat to experience.

Vera worked with the RCWMB until her father, former prime minister Alfred Deakin, began to ail in February 1919. After Australia entered WWII, Vera opened the Victorian branch of a new iteration of the RCWMB. She served as a co-director over a widening purview, as the Red Cross dealt with missing and dead soldiers and civilians across Europe and Asia. Yet, the ambition of Woods's book, in trying to cover both the complexities of Vera Deakin's life and the history of the RCWMB, is also a flaw. Although the book covers Vera's life pleasingly, the complexity of the RCWMB in WWI alone means we receive only an overview into the bureau's work. For instance, Vera's work during the 1943–44 bushfire crisis is reduced to two lines. The focus, as with so much to do with Australia's military history, is squarely on WWI.

Another, larger, issue arises from Woods working closely with Vera's descendants. Vera's early life was entwined with Alfred's political career and the text reflects this, especially when Alfred's protectionist party lost an election. We learn about Alfred's love of spiritualism, *The Wind in the Willows* and his begrudging support for women's suffrage, yet there is scant reference that he formulated what would come to be known as the White Australia policy. This does not need to be a major focus, but ignoring the White Australia policy while discussing Alfred Deakin and Federation-era Australia demonstrates a problematic and one-sided view of the colonial past. This is particularly egregious in the book's earlier chapters, which discuss the effects of Alfred Deakin's political career on his family.

This is a much-awaited and well-developed book for those interested in the Red Cross and the world wars, focusing on a woman almost unique in Australian history for her international influence. It never pretends to present Vera's life as one normal for a woman of her era and it couldn't: her life and work was simply too wide and complex to be easily discussed. Vera Deakin's life was daunting and, despite some flaws, this book is a meaningful contribution to scholarship on women in WWI-era Australia. I eagerly anticipate the further scholarship that will develop around Vera and the RCWMB in the future with this text as a base.

My Body Keeps Your Secrets

Zoe Smith
The Australian National University

My Body Keeps Your Secrets
Lucia Osborne-Crowley
(Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2021, 328pp. AU$30)
ISBN: 9781760878108

'Sometimes what hurts us the most is the aftermath, the everyday challenge of living in a body that has been damaged and disrespected and shamed', Lucia Osborne-Crowley provocatively asserts in the opening chapter of her second non-fiction work, *My Body Keeps Your Secrets* (26). The recent #Me Too movement has focused on uplifting the voices of survivors of sexual assault and sexual harassment, encouraging them to speak out about their experiences in order to demonstrate the prevalence of rape and the insidious culture of misogyny that male violence is unquestioningly constructed upon. Osborne-Crowley's work shows the capacity and need for progression beyond attention centred around survivors' experiences of the moment of rape and sexual harassment, focusing instead on 'the years and years and years … that come after the assault' (25). *My Body Keeps Your Secrets* gives prominence to survivors' experiences of exactly that, survival, and how they cope with both the aftermath of violence and abuse, and the impact that growing up in an oppressive society takes on female and non-binary bodies.

Osborne-Crowley shares not only her own experiences of rape and the traumatic aftermath, but also the experiences over a hundred female-identifying and non-binary individuals in order to consider how bodies carry the shame and secrets of sexual abuse. As she convincingly argues, and as the testimonies within demonstrate, experiences of trauma, especially sexual trauma, have a physical and tangible impact on survivors for the remainder of their lives.

Her argument is also bolstered by her extensive engagement with intersectional theoretical works by feminist scholars such as Brené Brown, Bri Lee and Audre Lorde, who have highlighted how women's voices, bodies and spaces have been treated by misogynistic societies, as well as engagement with scholarship focused more broadly on trauma and the body, such as that of Gabor Maté and Bessel van der Kolk.[1]

The interviews conducted by Osborne-Crowley and the experiences she details cover myriad ways in which female-identifying and non-binary bodies and minds have consciously and unconsciously coped with the aftermath of sexual assault and harassment, including, but not limited to, the development of varying eating disorders, chronic illnesses, mental health issues, unconsciously seeking out abusive relationships and alcohol and drug dependencies. The broad range of survivors' stories featured by Osborne-Crowley highlight the complexity, diversity and depth of experiences of trauma, as well as how these are compounded by societal pressures of race, class and gender. Olivia's story, featured in Chapter 11, sheds light on the systematic racism and sexism inherent in the United Kingdom's healthcare system. She learns 'again and again, that the young Blak body is so hyper-sexualised that she simply couldn't get a doctor to take [her] seriously' (240). Osborne-Crowley details the serious and lasting implications of this ingrained oppression: 'here's the kicker: ignoring women's pain not only inhibits the process of healing, it actually makes it more likely that the pain will become permanent' (224).

Osborne-Crowley's work is deeply intimate, extending beyond stories of masculine sexual violence perpetrated against female-identifying and non-binary individuals to interweave stories of emotional and physical abuse in both heterosexual and queer relationships. She also insightfully explores seemingly 'rape-adjacent' abuses such as Pema's experience of

1 Brené Brown, *I Thought It Was Just Me: Women Reclaiming Power and Courage in a Culture of Shame* (New York: Gotham, 2007); Brené Brown, *Men, Women and Worthiness: The Experiences of Shame and the Power of Being Enough* (Louisville, CO: Sounds True, 2012); Bri Lee, *Eggshell Skull: A Memoir about Standing up, Speaking Out and Fighting Back* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2018); Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984); Audre Lorde, *Your Silence Will Not Protect You* (London: Silver Press, 2017); Gabor Maté, *When the Body Says No: The Cost of Hidden Stress* (London: Vermilion, 2019); Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, Brain and Body in the Transformation of Trauma* (London: Penguin Books, 2014).

stealthing in Chapter 7, which Osborne-Crowley names as rape.[2] The book does lack an examination of structural forces of violence against women and an analysis of the construction and conditioning of masculinity of the perpetrators. However, given that Osborne-Crowley's focus is on the experiences of victims, not perpetrators, it is understandable why such an examination is beyond the scope of a book that already breaks new ground in literature surrounding assault and the body.

There are not necessarily clear sections to the book. Instead, the stories and voices of survivors in each chapter compound upon each other to reinforce Osborne-Crowley's argument and experience. They culminate in her concluding remark in which she details the singular reaction experienced 'three or more years, ten years, a lifetime after [abuse]: vulnerability, by which I mean strength' (304). Indeed, while it is not the easiest read in terms of potentially triggering subject matter to some (or many), Osborne-Crowley's argument and the first-hand evidence and testimonies within provide a necessary progression to conversations about trauma and assault, and a poignant insight into how female-identifying and non-binary individuals have managed this bodily trauma months, years and decades after the initial assault. With an impassioned tone and accessible, sharp prose, *My Body Keeps Your Secrets* is a pertinent work I would recommend to anyone with a vested interest in discourses of gender and power, anyone wanting to broaden their understanding of the long-term impact of violence and abuse for female-identifying and non-binary individuals, or for anyone who has survived trauma and those who love them.

2 Stealthing, according to Osborne-Crowley, references to the practise where 'men or people with penises covertly remove or break a condom after consent has been given on the condition of the use of the condom'. While only considered 'rape-adjacent' at the time of Pema's experience, it has been illegal in the UK since 2017, and a landmark German case in 2019 determined non-consensual removal of a condom to be a form of rape. Many jurisdictions have since followed suit in classifying stealthing as rape, and scholars such as Alexandra Brodsky have highlighted that practises such as stealthing may not have been 'considered part of the recognised repertoire of gender-based violence—but [were] rooted in the same misogyny and lack of respect' (143). Osborne-Crowley, *My Body Keeps Your Secrets*, 143. See also Alexandra Brodsky, '"Rape-adjacent": Imagining legal responses to nonconsensual condom removal', *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law* 32, no. 2 (2017): 183–210.

Banning the Bomb, Smashing the Patriarchy

Jessica Urwin
The Australian National University

Banning the Bomb, Smashing the Patriarchy
Ray Acheson
(Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021, 438pp. AU$38)
ISBN: 9781786614896

In 2017, 122 states voted in favour of a treaty to ban nuclear weapons. This vote was monumental, not least because it symbolised the triumph of humanitarian arguments against the existence of nuclear weapons over dominant—and patriarchal—deterrence narratives that have necessitated their existence for over 70 years. This vote demonstrated to nuclear proponents that a significant section of global society no longer bought into the 'patriarchal notion that violence is strength' (288). It represented an historic normative shift.

But precipitating normative change is not easy. This is made plain by Ray Acheson in *Banning the Bomb, Smashing the Patriarchy*, an exploration of the path towards this treaty. Acheson, a 'feminist, antimilitarist disarmament advocate', represented the Women's International League of Peace and Freedom (WILPF) on the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons' (ICAN) steering committee during the campaign (4). Their book provides an insider's account of how, why, and by whom the ban was spearheaded. Its chapters take the reader on a journey through the campaign, from its theoretical underpinnings through to the treaty's creation. And while not written for historians, it points to the historical precedence set by feminist and anticolonial movements in shaping discourse and activism against nuclear weapons.

Acheson's own activism, and the seeds of the ban treaty, are placed in conversation with the feminist literature of Carol Cohn, Cynthia Enloe and Sara Ruddick. These scholars have demonstrated the entanglement

of patriarchy and militarism, enacted through nuclear weapons. Acheson shows how these entanglements have been strengthened by the historic fetishisation of nuclear weapons as patriarchal objects of pride, power and prosperity. Opponents of nuclear weapons are made to appear emotional or irrational in juxtaposition to rational and legitimate nuclear-armed states. In order to ban the bomb, Acheson and their colleagues were required to smash—or at least expose—the patriarchy.

To do so, ICAN and its individual proponents took 'lessons from feminist movements, queer politics, and civil rights initiatives' (107). One such lesson was to challenge *who* can produce knowledge about nuclear weapons. The introduction of survivor testimonies to the campaign was, as Acheson suggests, a game changer. Not only did this precipitate greater engagement with the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, but it also gave space to perspectives different from those held by nuclear-armed or nuclear-supportive states. ICAN's campaign to ban nuclear weapons was predicated upon the notion that 'the very act of contesting and challenging dominant narratives helps to 'splinter' them, 'opening up space for change to take place' (77).

But, similar to social movements of decades past, the ban campaign suffered shortcomings. Notably, Acheson admits that ICAN 'continues to suffer from white, Western dominance', especially within the organisation's permanent staff (142). While some diverse voices were embraced, other activists admitted 'feeling the burden of not being white' (143). This is an uncomfortable point that Acheson addresses, but from which they quickly move on.

Despite the campaign's shortcomings, Acheson contends, it achieved its goal (at least on paper). Acheson shows that, by highlighting the effects of nuclear weapons upon people, those in support of a nuclear weapons ban injected a new discourse into the mainstream. The 'gaslighting' and 'bullying' of nuclear proponents ultimately proved insufficient to prevent this (215). In fact, Acheson argues that the determination of nuclear-armed and nuclear-supportive states to undermine the efforts of ICAN and others within the United Nations demonstrated just how much was—and remains—at stake.

Banning the Bomb, Smashing the Patriarchy is, ultimately, 'the story of individuals working hard to change a well-established norm of political power and international security' (278). Despite having been written for

an academic audience, it doubles as an uplifting manifesto for activists determined to enact normative change. Amongst the detailed descriptions of international treaty negotiation, Acheson reveals important lessons about humanity, collaboration, persistence and diversity. It also leaves its reader with the pertinent reminder that—irrespective of the efforts of antinuclear activists and their supporters both in this campaign, and earlier ones—the fight is not yet over.

Notes on Contributors

Bridget Andresen is a PhD candidate at the University of Queensland, and a member of the *Lilith* Editorial Collective. She holds a first-class honours degree and was awarded the Margaret Julia Ross Prize in Australian History and the 49th Batallion AIF Honour Fund Prize. Her research looks at the history of sexual violence in Australia, with a particular focus on Queensland. Previously, she has investigated the late nineteenth century and the experience of Indigenous complainants in the courtroom, and her current research examines adult rape trials in the mid-twentieth century. She is interested in the intersections between law, gender, sexuality and race, and how these influence ideas about consent and sexual violence within the criminal justice system.

Francesca Baldwin is a doctoral research student of history at the University of Reading and University of Exeter, funded by the South West & Wales Doctoral Training Partnership. Her research explores the conflict and post-conflict experiences of women in war in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. Through original oral history interviews, Francesca is building a repository of women's testimonies of war in Tigray over the past 50 years. From soldiers, to refugees, to survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, women have been at the forefront of war in Tigray. Francesca's research historicises their participation through the lens of the ongoing Tigray War.

Petra Brown is a lecturer at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Deakin University. She has research expertise in mid-twentieth century German philosophy and political theology. Her book *Bonhoeffer – God's Conspirator in a State of Exception* was published in 2019. She has a growing interest in feminist approaches to phenomenology, religion, ethics and political philosophy. Recent research interests include a feminist reading of Arendt's critique of sovereignty and violence, and feminist visions of political community.

Tamara Kayali Browne is a senior lecturer in health ethics and professionalism at Deakin University and an adjunct research fellow at Charles Sturt University. She completed her PhD at the University of Cambridge and later served as lecturer in bioethics at The Australian National University, winning three teaching awards. Her primary research

expertise is in the ethics of reproduction, gender and mental illness. Her papers have appeared in journals such as the *Journal of Medical Ethics*; *Philosophy, Psychiatry and Psychology*; and *Health, Risk and Society*. Her book, *Depression and the Self* (2018) was published by Cambridge University Press.

Rachel Caines is a PhD candidate in the Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences at the Australian Catholic University. Her research interests focus around the ways in which understandings of gender, race, nation, and Empire intersected across the British Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Emma Carson is a PhD candidate in the Department of Historical and Classical Studies at the University of Adelaide and a member of the *Lilith* Editorial Collective. She holds a first-class honours degree from the University of Adelaide and was the 2020 recipient of the Hugh Martin Weir Prize and an Australian Historical Association/Copyright Agency Writing Bursary. Her doctoral research uses letters to analyse the emotional impact of separation and military service on married couples during the Second World War. She is generally interested in twentieth-century conflict, and the histories of gender, emotions and sexuality.

Sharon Crozier-De Rosa is associate professor in history at the University of Wollongong. Her research is situated at the intersections of emotions, gender, imperial/colonial and violence histories, with a special focus on memory, affect and trauma. Transnational in scope, it spans Ireland, Britain, Australia and the United States of America. Her books include *Shame and the Anti-Feminist Backlash: Britain, Ireland and Australia, 1890–1920* (2018); *Remembering Women's Activism* (with Vera Mackie, 2019); and *Sources for the History of Emotions: A Guide* (with Katie Barclay and Peter Stearns, 2020). She is deputy editor of *Women's History Review* and an International Federation for Research in Women's History board member.

Ann Curthoys writes about class, race, gender and colonialism in Australian history as well as about the nature of historical writing. She is the author of *Freedom Ride: A Freedom Rider Remembers* (2002); co-author with John Docker of *Is History Fiction?* (2010); and co-author with Jessie Mitchell of *Taking Liberty: Indigenous Rights and Settler Self-Government in Colonial Australia, 1830 – 1890* (2018). Her first book, *For and Against*

Feminism (1988), has recently been reissued in digital format by Ligature Press. She is professor emerita at The Australian National University and an honorary professor at the University of Sydney.

Ruby Ekkel has recently completed a master's degree in global, transnational and spatial history at the University of St Andrews, Scotland. Her dissertation focused on Anna Kingsford, a prominent vegetarian and antivivisectionist, and the intersections of the animal welfare and women's movements in Victorian Britain. More widely, she researches women's history and environmental history, with award-winning published work on the Woman's Christian Temperance Union of Victoria and on the gendered historiography of mental mapping. She also co-edits a podcast, *The Bush Bash*, about Australian environmental history.

Belinda Eslick is a casual academic at the University of Queensland (UQ), where she is course coordinator and lecturer in the gender studies program, and a casual senior research fellow in the Griffith Asia Institute, Griffith University. She has a PhD in gender studies from UQ. Her research and teaching interests include European feminist philosophy, feminist theory and decolonial and ecofeminist perspectives in feminist and gender studies. Her current research projects are focused on Luce Irigaray's thinking on sexual difference, rethinking women's non-institutional political practices and work that focuses on feminist perspectives on 'the home' and reproductive labour.

Catherine Kevin is an associate professor in history at Flinders University. She has published on histories of pregnancy, reproductive politics and domestic violence, gender and migration, and the cultural history of colonialism. She is the author of *Dispossession and the Making of 'Jedda': Hollywood in Ngunnawal Country* (2020) and is currently undertaking an Australian Research Council–funded project on the history of domestic violence, 1850–2020 with Ann Curthoys and Zora Simic.

Tianna Killoran is a PhD candidate at James Cook University in Townsville. Her research project investigates the history of the Japanese migrant community in north Queensland between 1880 and 1946. Her research interests include migration history and Australian women's history, particularly where they intersect. She was selected as a National Library of Australia Summer Scholar in 2020 and has previously been published in *History Australia* and *Sūdō*.

Brydie Kosmina lives in Tarndanya on unceded Kaurna land, and works at the University of Adelaide as a visiting research fellow. Her first monograph is forthcoming with Palgrave Macmillan, and her work has been published in the *Journal of Popular Culture* and *Continuum*. Brydie works as a postgraduate/early career researcher representative for the Cultural Studies Association of Australia and serves on the *Lilith* Editorial Collective. She writes about witches, nuclear bombs and other strange things.

Ann McGrath is the W. K. Hancock Chair of History at The Australian National University and the director of the Research Centre for Deep History. She holds a Kathleen Fitzpatrick Laureate Fellowship from the Australian Research Council. Her research interests include deep human history, scale, and gender and colonialism. Her publications include *Illicit Love: Interracial Sex and Marriage in the United States and Australia* (2015); the edited collections *Routledge Companion to Global Indigenous History* (with Lynette Russell, 2021) and *Long History, Deep Time*: *Deepening Histories of Place* (with Mary Anne Jebb, 2015). She co-authored *Creating a Nation* (1994) with Pat Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake and Marian Quartly.

Janet Ramsay was a history academic at Macquarie University where she founded the first courses on the history of women from 1975. She then worked on development and delivery of policy for women for the Commonwealth and Queensland governments. In 1991 she was awarded the Public Service Medal (Commonwealth) for her work as national director of a National Domestic Violence Education Program. Her PhD thesis (graduated 2005) is on the external and internal policy processes employed in developing domestic violence policy between 1970 and 1985. Janet is now a board member of the Jessie Street National Women's Library.

Yves Rees (they/them) is a writer and historian based on unceded Wurundjeri land. They are a lecturer in history at La Trobe University, the co-host of *Archive Fever* history podcast and the author of *All About Yves: Notes from a Transition* (2021). They are also co-editor of *Nothing to Hide: Voices of Trans and Gender Diverse Australia* (2022). They are a historian of Australia in the world, with particular interests in gender, modernity, mobility and whiteness. Rees has won the Calibre Essay Prize, the Serle Award and a Varuna Residential Fellowship.

Nicole Ritchie is a teacher and historian with an interest in the histories of gender, medicine and masculinity. She completed her honours and master's degrees at Monash University and currently teaches humanities at a secondary school in Melbourne. In 2016 she completed the Australian War Memorial Summer Scholar's program, researching the First AIF's perception of tanks. In 2017 she completed her thesis on returned servicemen's suicide in the Australian interwar period. She currently co-hosts *Women of War*, a podcast focusing on the myriad roles women have played in historical wars, including an episode looking at Vera Deakin's work in World War I.

Saskia Roberts is a PhD candidate in history at The Australian National University (ANU) and a member of the *Lilith* Editorial Collective. Her research concerns intimate knowledge, Australian teenage girls and print culture between 1970 and 2010. She has published with *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal* and authored several papers for the Northern Territory Treaty Commission. She completed a Bachelor of European Studies (honours)/Bachelor of Arts at ANU in 2018, with her honours research focusing on cultural representations of infanticide in fin-de-siècle Australia and France.

Madeleine C. Seys is a feminist fashion and cultural historian, writer, curator and textile artist living, making and learning on unceded Kaurna land in Adelaide, South Australia. She is a postdoctoral research fellow on the Australian Research Council Special Research Initiative 'Between Indian and Pacific Oceans: Reframing Australian Literature' and a sessional academic in the Department of English, Creative Writing and Film at the University of Adelaide. Her first monograph, *Fashion and Narrative in Victorian Popular Literature: Double Threads* (2018), was published by Routledge. Madeleine's bespoke tailoring has been worn to protests, weddings, lectures and the everyday activism of life.

Jordana Silverstein is a senior research fellow in the Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness in the Melbourne Law School at the University of Melbourne. A cultural historian, she researches histories of statelessness, Australian child refugee policies and Jewish history, focusing on questions of belonging, identity, historiography, emotions, sexuality and memory. She is the author of *Anxious Histories: Narrating the Holocaust in Jewish Communities at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century* (2015) and

co-editor of *Refugee Journeys: Histories of Resettlement, Representation and Resistance* (2021). Her second book, *Cruel Care*, is forthcoming in 2023 with Monash University Publishing.

Zora Simic is a senior lecturer in history and gender studies in the School of Humanities and Languages at UNSW. She has published widely on past and present feminisms and migration history, and is currently working on a history of domestic violence in Australia with Ann Curthoys and Catherine Kevin.

Zoe Smith is a PhD candidate in the School of History at The Australian National University. She is broadly interested in gender history, feminist history, Australian colonial history and histories of violence (especially sexual violence and domestic violence). Her previous research has centred on gendered and racialised ideals and discourses surrounding interracial rape in mid-nineteenth century Queensland, while her current research involves using colonial women's writings to illuminate discourses and ideas surrounding femininity, masculinity and intimate partner violence from 1880 to 1914, and thus write a cultured and gendered history of intimate partner violence during this period.

Jessica Urwin is a PhD candidate in the School of History at The Australian National University. Her research seeks to explicate the ways that Australia's nuclear history has interacted with, co-opted or facilitated colonialism since the beginning of the twentieth century. She has been published in leading Australian history journals as well in the *Conversation*, *Inside Story* and *Australian Book Review*.